

ONLINE PATIENT RATINGS OF HAND SURGEONS

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Introduction

Multiple factors influencing the rise of physician rating websites:

- Patient-centered care
- Social media
- Ubiquitous internet access

Multiple concerns regarding validity of data on these websites:

- User bias
- No mechanism to confirm that users are patients
- Outliers

Despite being previously studied in several subspecialties, no data on online patient ratings of hand surgeons

Methods

- 250 surgeons randomly selected from ASSH member directory
- Online data from HealthGrades, RateMDs, and Vitals.com
- Quantitative ratings recorded
- Text comments categorized (Table 1)
- Data also collected for each surgeon on:
 - Number of physician rating websites in top 10 Google search results
 - Presence of professional website, Facebook profile, Twitter profile
- Statistics performed by biostatistician (J.T.N.)

Results

- **98%** of surgeons had at least one online rating
- >80% had at least 1 text comment
- Mean number of rating sites in a surgeon's **Google top 10 was 3.4**
- Significant positive correlation found between **number of ratings** and mean overall rating on all sites ($p < 0.001$)
- **Castle Connolly** doctors had a higher mean rating on all sites ($p < 0.05$)
- Aggregate "**Online Presence**" (gauged by the existence of personal profiles on social media/professional websites) correlated to higher mean ratings
- A significantly higher proportion of **positive text comments related to surgeon competence** (i.e. column 1, Table 1) while a higher proportion of **negative comments related to factors independent of surgeon competence** (i.e. column 3)

Table 1: Categorical Review of Online Text Comments

Comment Categories

- 1) Comments related to surgeon professional competence and/or clinical outcome
- 2) Comments related to surgeon communication, availability, and/or a statement or recommendation without further explanation
- 3) Comments *unrelated* to surgeon competence (e.g. cost, office staff, and/or practice characteristics)

		Comment Category			Total # of Comments
		1 – Competence	2 - Communication	3 - Other	
RateMDs.com	4-5 stars	240 (40%)	214 (36%)	139 (23%)	593
	3 stars	36 (37%)	40 (41%)	22 (22%)	98
	1-2 stars	37 (26%)	52 (36%)	54 (38%)	143
	P Value	0.005	0.665	0.002	
Vitals.com	4 stars	361 (33%)	484 (45%)	235 (22%)	1,081
	3 stars	14 (30%)	19 (40%)	14 (30%)	47
	1-2 stars	108 (28%)	146 (37%)	136 (35%)	390
	P Value	0.111	0.041	<0.001	

Conclusions

- Despite concerns, physician rating websites increasingly influence doctor selection. This is reflected by their prominence on Google.
- Increased online presence correlates to improved online patient ratings.
- Patient dissatisfaction with care may frequently be associated with factors such as cost, office staff and/or practice characteristics, as opposed to factors directly related to surgeon competence and/or clinical outcome.