

An Examination of Negative One-Star Online Patient Reviews and Complaints for Foot and Ankle Orthopaedic Surgeons: A Retrospective Analysis

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INTRODUCTION: The global use of internet-based search platforms has led to a marked rise in the use of Physician Review Websites (PRWs), such as Vitals.com. Market analysis suggests that 68% of patients may factor the content of online reviews into their decisions when seeking healthcare options. While previous studies have examined extremely negative "one-star" reviews across orthopaedic surgery subspecialties such as adult reconstruction and orthopaedic traumatology, no study to date has explored negative one-star online reviews in foot and ankle orthopaedic surgery. The purpose of this study is to examine one-star negative reviews and subsequent written complaints on those reviews to better understand factors that contribute to negative patient experiences with foot and ankle orthopaedic surgeons.

METHODS:

This is a retrospective analysis of the negative one-star online reviews from Vitals.com for foot and ankle orthopaedic surgeons and podiatrists in the top ten most populated cities in the United States. Included foot and ankle surgeons had at least one negative one-star review with at least one complaint. For the purposes of this study, a "review" refers to the star rating (one to five star) and a "complaint" refers to the written information provided by the patient on the one-star review. Data collected included education of physician (orthopaedic surgeon or podiatrist), number of total reviews, number of one-star reviews, number of complaints on the one-star review, and type of complaint on the one-star review. Complaints were stratified by treating physician education as well as patients receiving or not receiving surgical intervention.

RESULTS: From 2,645 surgeons retrieved on initial search, a total of 341 foot and ankle surgeons with at least one negative one-star review were evaluated from the top ten most populated cities throughout the United States. For specialty, 182 (53.4%) were orthopaedic surgeons and 159 (46.6%) were podiatrists. Orthopaedic surgeons (n=182) had a total of 2,571 reviews with 383 one-star reviews (14.9% of total reviews) with 619 complaints. Podiatrists (n=159) had a total of 865 reviews with 181 one-star reviews (20.9% of total reviews) with 266 complaints. Podiatrists had a significantly higher proportion of negative one-star online reviews as compared to foot and ankle orthopaedic surgeons ($p < 0.001$). The most common complaints on one-star reviews for foot and ankle orthopaedic surgeons were bedside manner (33.0%), complaints about other medical staff (14.7%), and surgical outcomes/complications (14.4%). The most common complaints on one-star reviews for podiatrists were bedside manner (35.3%), complaints about other medical staff (22.6%), and disagreement with the podiatrists decision-making or medical plan (14.3%). When complaints were stratified by patients receiving surgical intervention or not receiving surgical intervention, the most common complaints for surgical patients were surgical outcomes/complications (45.0%), uncontrolled pain (18.7%), and bedside manner (13.9%). The most common complaints for nonsurgical patients were bedside manner (41.5%), complaints about other medical staff (22.4%), and disagreement with physician decision-making or medical plan (13.4%).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

Bedside manner and complaints about other medical staff are most common complaints for both foot and ankle orthopaedic surgeons and podiatrists on negative one-star online reviews. When stratified by patients receiving surgical treatment, surgical outcomes/complaints was the most common complaint for patients receiving surgical treatment. Podiatrists had a significantly higher proportion of negative one-star online reviews as compared to foot and ankle orthopaedic surgeons in the current study. This data serves to inform practicing foot and ankle surgeons as to the influences behind patients leaving online extremely negative reviews.

Type of One-Star Complaint	Surgical Group Complaints (% of Surgical Group)	Non-Operative Complaints (% of Surgical Group)	Total Complaints	Percent of Total Complaints
Not Enough Time With Physician	5 (2.0%)	62 (9.8%)	67	7.6%
Wait Time	9 (3.6%)	61 (9.6%)	70	7.9%
Bedside Manner/Patient Experience	35 (13.9%)	263 (41.5%)	298	33.7%
Surgical Complications/Outcomes	113 (45.0%)	-	113	12.8%
Disagree with Physician Decision or Plan	33 (13.1%)	85 (13.4%)	118	13.3%
Uncontrolled Pain	47 (18.7%)	21 (3.3%)	68	7.7%
Medical Staff/ Institution Related Complaint	9 (3.6%)	142 (22.4%)	151	17.1%
Total Number of Complaints	251 (100%)	634 (100%)	885	100.0%