

Awareness and Perception of Google® Reviews Among French GPs

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to assess the perception of French general practitioners (GPs) and the impact of the Google® online physician rating system. We questioned the French GPs with a self-administered questionnaire. A total of 412 GPs had answered the complete questionnaire. 83.25% of respondents did not validate the relevance of the physician rating websites. The most decried limitations were the lack of validity of these opinions and the negative impact on physicians.

Keywords:

General Practitioners; Physician rating websites; Internet

Introduction

Patients are increasingly using the Internet to search for medical information, and in the same way that they inquire about a restaurant, a museum or a store, they can now find information about their doctor through physician rating websites (PRWs) [1-6]. PRWs provide information about the physicians and their practice. This type of platform supports patient empowerment, and from a patient perspective, could provide patients with needed information about physician quality [1]. As a result, patients report using PRWs before consulting a doctor [3], and Hanauer et al. reported 37% of patients had not consulted a doctor because of these ratings.

From the physician's perspective, the opinions are divided on the usefulness and relevance of the ratings. On the one hand, patient experience is a key component of the measurement of the quality of care delivered by a physician or a healthcare organization and may be taken into account to improve practices. On the other hand, a majority of GPs were unfavorable to ratings and questioned their validity [5]. Physicians reported that ratings could increase physician job stress and generate a negative effect on the physician-patient relationship [6]. However, it was reported that PRWs did not affect their practice [5]. Their distrust of PRWs is linked to lack of validation, low sample size, biased reviews, lack of avenue to respond particularly toward an inaccurate or libelous review, and misrepresentation of their practice. Interestingly, many studies showed that the majority of ratings were positive, especially for the ease of scheduling, time spent with patient, waiting time, surgeon proficiency/knowledge, and bedside manner.

In France, PRWs have not been very successful, and few of them are still online today. In addition to the specialized PRWs, it is possible to rate physicians on social media platforms (e.g. Google), next to restaurants, cinemas, public places.

Methods

An online questionnaire consisting of 42 questions was submitted to established French general practitioners, i.e. those who are self-employed or have a mixed practice. In France, in 2018, there were 55,300 independent general practitioners (liberal activity or mixed activity) in regular activity. Survey questions included GPs characteristics, awareness of recommendations on eReputation, awareness of Google's rating of physicians, and their perception of this practice and its impact on their activities. The form was dynamic and each question had to be answered in order to proceed to the next, and forms not completed were excluded from the analysis.

The link of the LimeSurvey questionnaire was distributed to the French general practitioners installed via social networks (Facebook® groups of promotions of doctors). Secondly, we solicited all the Departmental Councils of the Metropolitan Medical Association (nb = 101). Sixteen had agreed to the distribution of the questionnaire either on their website. The study was carried out from June 15th, 2020 to August 30th, 2020.

Results

Among the 537 forms collected, one hundred and twenty-five (23.3%) were incomplete (i.e. respondents did not finish the questionnaire) and were therefore excluded from the analysis. Among the 412 respondents, 356 (86.41%) GPs were aware of the existence of doctor ratings on Google, 112 (27.2%) had a GMB profile, and 100 (24.7%) had already consulted it. 89 GPs reported a median [Q1;Q3] rating of 4.3 [3.8;5.0] (out of 5) and a median [Q1;Q3] number of ratings of 5.0 [3.0;9.5].

343 GPs (83.25%) reported that GMB ratings were not relevant to the profession, 15 (3.64%) relevant and 54 (13.11%) neutral. The Figure 1 presents the disadvantages and advantages reported by GPs. Disadvantages pointed out were lack of validation (n = 289, 94.42%), negative impact on physicians and their practices (n = 254, 61.65%), negative impact on the doctor-patient relationship (n = 227, 55.10%), lack of confidentiality (n = 208, 50.49%) and limited usability (n = 154, 37.37%). On the benefits aspect, interviewees considered PRWs as patient's guide to choosing health care professionals (n = 77, 18.69%), a patient satisfaction tool (n = 60, 14.56%), a marketing tool for the physician (n = 27, 6.55%), a practice improvement and quality control tool (n = 44, 10.68%). 269 GPs (65.29 %) reported GMB ratings had no advantages.



Figure 1— Advantages and disadvantages of doctor ratings on Google, reported by general practitioners

According to the GPs interviewed, the first characteristic that patients may assess with the online ratings was the infrastructure of the medical practice with 85.68% vs 10.92%, while the last characteristic was the professional competence and quality of care received with 18.20% vs 75.97%.

Physicians who consulted their GMB profile (n=100) reported more positive comments than negative (69.94%). The topics covered (out of 4 suggested) were first their communication, relational and teaching skills (57.0%), then their medical skills and the quality of care provided (54.0%), then the organization of the practice (39.0%) and finally the infrastructure (22.0%). For each of these categories, comments were more often positive than negative.

95 respondents (23.1 %) thought that a written comment could make them change their practice, while 138 (33.5 %) did not know. Concerning GPs who had already consulted their record (n=100), 11 (11.0 %) had changed their practices following a negative opinion. The changes were related to communication and relationship skills (6.0%), practice organization (3.0%) and infrastructure (2.0%). Among the GPs who reported having consulted their records (n=100), 28 (28.0 %) had a negative experience when visiting their records, 21 (21.0 %) had a positive experience, 39 (39.0 %) reported a neutral experience and 12 (12.0%) had no opinion. Anger (28.0 %), satisfaction (27.0 %), and unfairness (26.0 %) were the 3 most common feelings felt. 39.0 % of them also have reported a psychological impact of the consultation of their GMB profile.

When asked how to adjust online ratings to be appropriate for use in medicine, 202 GPs (49.0 %) considered to completely remove online ratings, 151 (36.6%) to implement user identity authentication, 143 (34.7%) to privatize the reviews and 122 (29.6%) to implement a system of moderation. The introduction of a scoring score more adapted to the profession was submitted by 75 (18.2%) while 58 (14.1%) advocated no change.

Conclusions

In our study, the majority of the French working GPs massively denounced the lack of relevance of patient opinions on their Google My Business® professional record, and in particular their validity and negative impact. It would be appropriate for French GPs to increase the validity of notices by means of a validated evaluation tool and user authentication.

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