



Responding to online comments about your practice

This is a reminder for practices about what they can do if they receive notification of negative comments posted on the NHS Choices website.

We understand practices are notified of a comment relating to them following the publication of the comment. An alert is sent to a named recipient at the practice in question (designated by the practice). Practices then have a number of options:

Post a reply, in order to put across the practice's views, demonstrate you are listening (which doesn't have to mean you agree with the comment) and are dealing with any issues raised. This will appear immediately below the original comment. Practices should carefully consider how they wish to deal with any negative comments. A prompt response inviting the person who made the comment to contact the practice to discuss their views is a powerful reputation management tactic and a useful defence against an unfair comment. Being proactive can only enhance the perception of the practice in the eyes of the public. Ensure any responses are professional and factual rather than aggressive or defensive.

Report the comment to the website moderator as unsuitable.

Some practices prefer to ignore comments, however, this can backfire on the practice – it can look as if the practice doesn't listen or care about how the practice may be perceived. It is also a missed opportunity to point out all the good things you are doing. As it is free advertising, turn it on its head and use it. After all, if a comment was made in person in the surgery, they wouldn't be ignored.

NHS Choices have a comments policy on their website which states that should a comment be flagged by a practice as unsuitable, then this will alert their moderators to take down the comment, consider it, and then either remove it or reinstate it as they deem appropriate.

The following NHS Choices guidance may assist practices in managing any comments they receive:

Managing patient feedback

Best practice – responding to patient feedback

It is also worth reading the advice from Google about responding to online reviews as patients can leave comments on various sites that you may not be aware of.

Practices may also have a Facebook business page created without their knowledge when a patient creates a 'check-in' on Facebook. Details of how to take control of an 'unmanaged business page' on Facebook are here. Having control of the page allows the practice to reply to comments as the business owner. Practices may wish to set up their own Facebook business page to pre-empt the automatic creation of one or at least make occasional checks to see if one has been created and what comments have been left on it.

If you need any further advice on NHS Choices comments or managing patient feedback please contact our GP Support team (gpsupport@lmc.org.uk).