

Protecting Your Professional Reputation as an Asset

By Ike Devji, J.D.

This article was originally written for a Physician audience, but applies to ANY business.

As with most of your assets there is a lot more offense at play against your professional reputation than there is defense. A simple Google search under a phrase like “doctor complaints” produced seventeen million, (yes, million) results, while a more focused search of “doctor complaints Arizona”, where I work from, narrowed it down to only two million results.

Given the power of the internet and the unmistakable reach and shelf life of a digital complaint to hurt you, it’s more important than ever to both have and defend a professional reputation. Complaints are often unsubstantiated, lacking in factual basis or planted by disgruntled employees or even competing doctors. I have personally supervised legal action against such doctors who have attacked my successful MD clients online under a cloak of presumed anonymity and who faced serious lawsuits for defamation, since they knowingly published and circulated false information about another doctor with a specific intent to do harm.

First Line of Defense – Be Nice and Demand the Same from Your Staff

In most cases, people complain because they get their feelings hurt about the treatment and service they receive from doctors and their staff. That leads to them telling a large number of people and in the worst cases finding a public forum in which to air their grievances. The number one issue I’ve seen on many of these sites is SERVICE followed by BILLING. Doctors and offices that are described as “rude, insulting, patronizing, and dishonest” seem to have the highest number of complaints.

As they fill out the form on that website a simple complaint like, “The Doctor always makes me wait half an hour” will often grow in scope and scale and include comments on the office staff, billing and half a dozen other things they weren’t even upset about until something made them mad enough to sit down someplace and write it up. Once it’s written, it’s simple to copy and paste it on Yelp! and ten other sites, and many of these sites actually link to and look up complaints on others so it can go “viral” pretty quickly. Getting a series of sites to take that information down is difficult and time consuming and they are not afraid of your threatening phone calls or your lawyer’s letter in most cases.

Second Line of Defense – Have an Online Reputation that You Control

I know you are inundated with calls mails and letters from self-professed online marketing experts, but they are right, you do need to at least have a *presence* so that

your information, accolades and websites are easily found and can compete with any negative noise or chatter about you and your practice.

A basic start is a website and profiles posted on physician-finder websites that include accurate information on your practice, experience, professional accomplishments and other information that you can control. Make sure that those who have an ax to grind against you or your staff are not the only voices being heard. Most people are reasonable and understand that you can't please all the people all the time, but you'd be amazed how many times I look up a particular physician on the internet for some business purpose and all I can find is complaints and generic doctor finder website profiles that list only an address, name and phone number. It's bad business from both reputational standpoint and a marketing standpoint to be that hard to find and consumers feel that businesses without web presences are outdated and inefficient.

Specific Tips

- NEVER address specific complaints of malpractice in a public forum, it can and will be used against you;
- Don't ignore comments and complaints and don't get into online arguments;
- Answer in professional and respectful way even if the complaint was not posed that way. Set the tone for the discourse and stick to it, be the bigger person;
- Address the issue in general terms that don't compromise the doctor patient relationship (think HIPAA lawsuit);
- Don't be afraid to say our are sorry and that your will fix it if that is the case;
- If the complaint is bogus or malicious be firm in your denial and explanations. Don't give in just to appease an internet bully with a big mouth.
- Follow through with promised actions and resolutions; they will make it known if you don't.

Asset Protection only attorney Ike Devji has over eight years of practice devoted exclusively to Asset Protection and Wealth Preservation planning. He works with a national client base including 1000's of physicians and business owners often through their local attorney, CPA or financial advisor. Together, he and his associates protect billions of dollars in personal assets for these clients. Ike also regularly writes, teaches and speaks on these issues to physicians and other professionals nationally. See his work in WORTH, Advisor Today, Physician's Practice and at www.ProAssetProtection.Com

As always, the information presented here is general and educational and can never replace the advice of experienced counsel specific to your assets or situation. This article originally appeared at www.PhysiciansPractice.Com where Ike Devji is a regular contributor, and is reprinted here with permission.

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