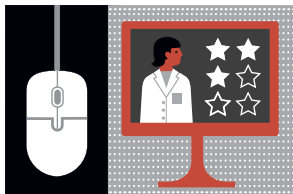


1 MORE PATIENTS ARE WEB SURFING FOR DOCS

Nearly a third of consumers have read doctor reviews, PricewaterhouseCoopers reports, while Google searches for crowdsourced MD data have doubled since 2007. The info is now found on dozens of sites, from medically focused Healthgrades and Vitals.com to general review sites like Angie's List and Yelp. What you'll find: an overall rating based on patient reviews, info about training, plus metrics such as time spent per patient, office wait, and customer service.



2 THE SITES ARE GREAT FOR BEDSIDE MANNER...

Look for patterns in the reviews to get a sense of a doctor's patient style. That's especially useful when choosing a family practitioner, less so for a specialist. "The narrower the doctor's expertise, the more you need their knowledge, not their personality," says Pamela Gallin, author of *How to Survive Your Doctor's Care*. Some site extras: ZocDoc lets you book appointments via its portal; Angie's List offers a service to help detect billing errors.

5

Things to Know About Vetting a Doctor Online

by Beth Braverman

3 ... BUT LESS USEFUL FOR ASSESSING QUALITY OF CARE

Studies have found weak correlation between health ratings and other measures of how successfully a provider treats patients. And the sites offer little data on the outcomes of procedures by specific docs. That may change because of Obamacare, which ties Medicare financial incentives to performance; that should make more data available.

4 CHOOSING A HOSPITAL? GET A FULL LOWDOWN

"There's much more quality and safety information available for hospitals than for physicians," says Matt Austin, a patient-safety expert at Johns Hopkins Medicine. Use the Hospital Compare tool at Medicare.gov to see how readmission, complication, and death rates compare with the national averages, plus patient satisfaction data. Check LeapfrogGroup.org for safety ratings by hospital and procedure and InformedPatientInstitute.org for state-specific data.



5 FOR COST INFO, HEAD TO YOUR INSURER'S SITE

As part of their doctor search tools, most health plan websites will help estimate your out-of-pocket for a particular doctor or hospital. For in-network care, large insurers such as Cigna and Aetna will factor in your plan design, deductible, and their pricing agreements with specific practices. Such tools have become more popular as patients shoulder more of their medical bills. Says UnitedHealthcare's Victoria Bogatyrenko: "Consumers are more price-sensitive." **M**