

## Online Reviews of American Plastic Surgeons

**Background:** The online reputation of a practicing plastic surgeon is becoming increasingly important. Physician review websites (PRWs) offer patients an opportunity to search their surgeon, but many providers argue these ratings can be misused. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the landscape of online reviews in a national cohort of plastic surgeons.

**Methods:** Twenty plastic surgery residency programs were selected randomly (5 from each US region). Affiliated, full-time academic plastic surgeon faculty served as the basis of the study cohort. Gender, age, region, city size, and practice type were recorded. The American Society of Plastic Surgeons' "Find a Plastic Surgeon" feature was used to select a matched cohort of plastic surgeons in private practice. A Google search was performed with "name, MD" and the position of personal, academic, and PRW was noted among the search results. The number of reviews and scaled rating scores (out of 5) were recorded from the three most popular PRWs. A "malicious" rating was defined as a "1/5" review on either Vitals or RateMDs. Data were collected during December 2014 and comparisons were made via Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests.

**Results:** Of 440 plastic surgeons, 99.9% had a profile on HealthGrades, 98.6% on Vitals, and 81.9% on RateMDs. The median search result position for academic website was 2, HealthGrades 3, personal website 4, and Vitals 6. Ratings were based on 15.6 +/- 13.1 reviews for HealthGrades, 14.5 +/- 16.5 for Vitals, and 4.7 +/- 6.1 for RateMDs respectively. Average scores were 4.1 +/- 0.7 for HealthGrades, 4.3 +/- 0.7 for Vitals, and 4.0 +/- 1.1 for RateMDs. 40.1% of plastic surgeons had at least one "malicious" rating on Vitals and 20.8% on RateMDs. No difference was seen in the median number or quality of reviews with regards to gender, age, US region, city size, or practice type ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Conclusions:** Awareness of online reviews may help plastic surgeons better manage their online reputation. While mostly positive, a significant number of negative reviews exist. We suggest plastic surgeons monitor these sites given their high visibility and potential influence on patients.