

Only one in five doctors aware of patient feedback about their care online, survey reveals

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Around one in five doctors are aware of patient feedback about themselves on review and ratings websites, according to a new survey of health professionals.

Their answers also reveal that GPs felt strongly that online feedback is negative, particularly on [social media](#).

The new study led by the University of Warwick, published today (3 June) in the *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy*, demonstrates that [health](#) service staff are cautious about using online feedback due to assumptions that it will be overwhelmingly negative, potentially missing opportunities to improve care.

Healthcare services use a number of methods to collect information on patient experiences, including surveys and Patient Participation Groups, and policymakers have pushed for greater use of online feedback in addition to traditional sources.

The research is based on a survey of 1001 registered [doctors](#) in primary and secondary care and 749 nurses and midwives in the UK. It examined their experience and attitude towards online sources of patient feedback, on sites such as I Want Great Care, NHS Choices (now the NHS website) and Care Opinion.

It found that just 27.7% of doctors and 21% of nurses were aware of feedback online about an episode of care that they had been involved in, while only 20.5% of doctors and 11.1% of nurses were aware of feedback about them as an individual specifically.

Dr. Helen Atherton, from Warwick Medical School, said: "We saw a lack of awareness from [healthcare professionals](#) of when feedback had been left about the care they delivered, whether as an individual or team. Overall, awareness and use by doctors is low. But we are seeing that doctors are much more negative about online feedback than nurses, and more so with GPs.

"There's a real need that if NHS organisations are collecting this data

that they need to be communicating it to frontline staff, because it's pointless for the [patients](#) if their message isn't getting through."

The majority of doctors did not encourage patients to leave feedback and only 38% felt that it was useful in improving services. This is despite previous research showing that online feedback tends to be generally positive towards the health service. The survey also highlighted that [healthcare](#) staff were more wary of feedback on social media, with 65.4% of doctors feeling that feedback on social media is generally negative.

Dr. Atherton adds: "Previous research in this area by our team shows that it tends to be more positive than people think. Healthcare organisations should be putting protocols in place for this feedback and developing plans for what to do with it. If healthcare professionals are aware of it and take control of the process a little more by actively soliciting it then it's more likely to be useful to them. There are positive examples of how commentary left by NHS patients on review sites have led to changes in the health service.

"Professionals were more wary of social media than they were of ratings and review websites so these are probably the easiest ways to source [feedback](#) in practice. You know where your patient is going and you can pick up comments and act on them, something that is more difficult with social media."

More information: Helen Atherton et al, Online patient feedback: a cross-sectional survey of the attitudes and experiences of United Kingdom health care professionals, *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/1355819619844540](https://doi.org/10.1177/1355819619844540)

Provided by University of Warwick

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