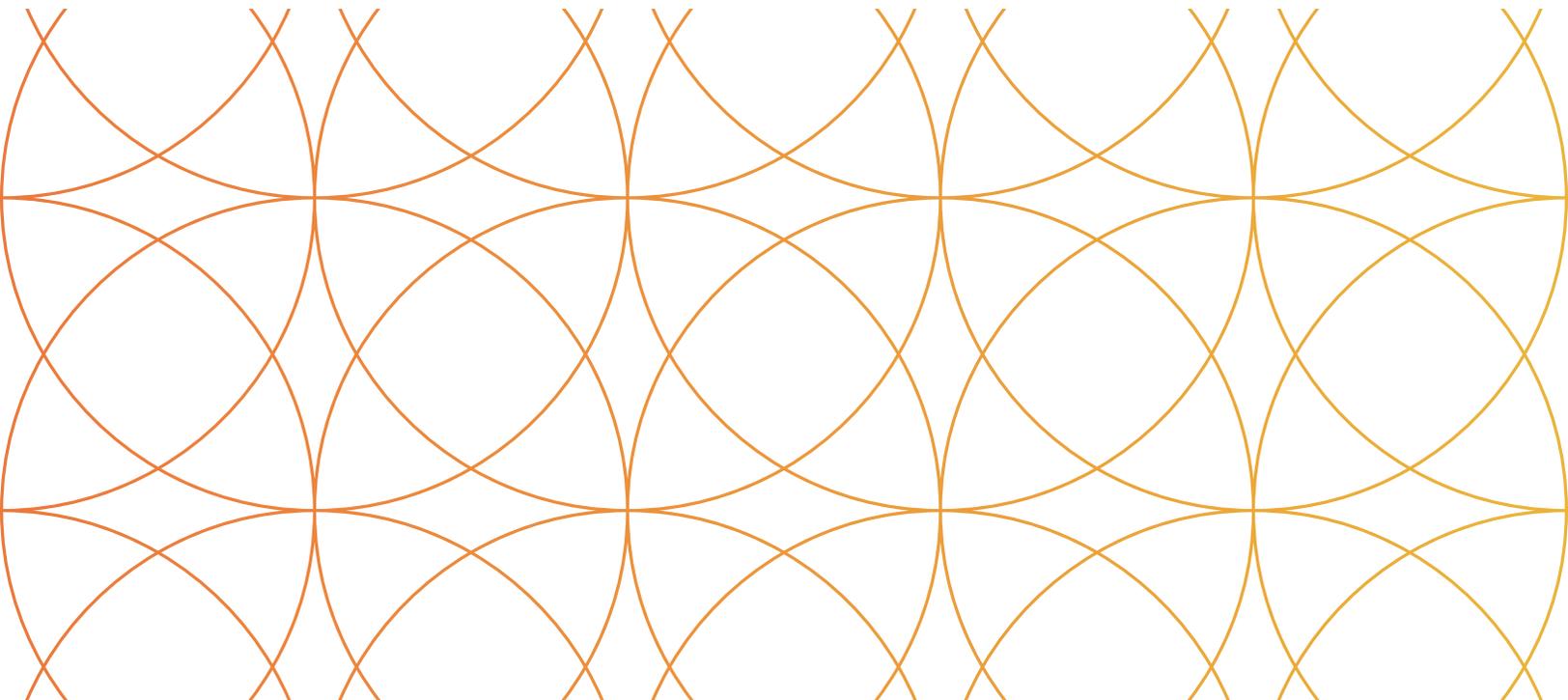


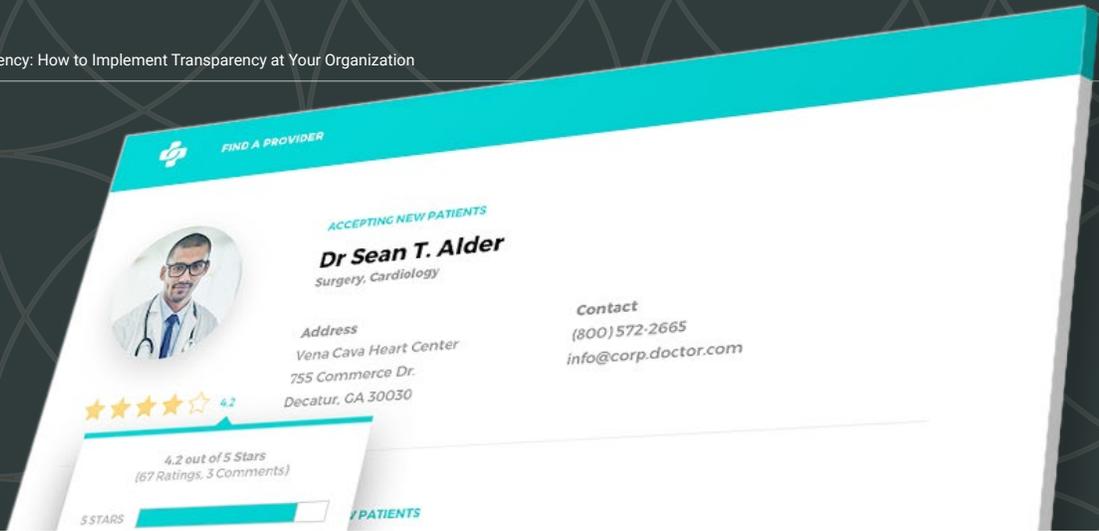


# The Road to Transparency

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How to Implement Transparency at  
Your Organization





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## About the Authors

### Noel Coleman



Noel is President of Doctor.com Enterprise, and he has worked through sales, sales leadership and now leads the company's vision and strategy. Having worked with hundreds of the top healthcare organizations from around the country, Noel is an expert in strategies with physician data management.

### Chad Giles



Chad Giles is the Senior Creative Director at Doctor.com. Chad received a BFA from Kennesaw State University. Throughout his career, he has worked with a range of clients including Coca-Cola, Home Depot, Office Depot, and American Lung Association but has spent the last six years specializing in the healthcare industry, focusing in UI/UX implementations of large scale sites and directories.

## Introduction

While almost a cliché with how often it is said, the truth is that health consumers are actively researching organizations and physicians online. The consumer trend for online reviews in other industries has found its way into health. In fact, over 80% of people now report their healthcare search begins online. People want to know more about the quality and experience they can expect before walking through your doors. If you don't get in front of this evolutionary change in the healthcare market, you put the public perception of your organization in the hands of others and lose the opportunity to improve the performance of your organization.

Patient Experience Transparency (Provider Ratings) is the sharing of patient feedback, both positive and negative, from surveys such as CG-CAHPs. Transparency can bring performance improvement, brand power, patient acquisition and many other benefits. But an organization must fully commit to it and use an appropriate technological solution to maximize these benefits.

Multiple third party websites are already tracking patient feedback about your organization. None of these websites have valid or verified data, but consumers consider them anyway! This presents a huge opportunity for health providers to stand apart from their competitors and directly provide consumers with reliable data instead of leaving them to rely on websites whose data can be altered by anyone with an internet connection.

Make no mistake: without better options, consumers are already using unreliable third party websites to research your organization. Making your patient satisfaction data transparent and accessible to the public isn't only a marketing strategy; transparency also drives performance improvement through accountability as well.

To implement transparency, your patient feedback data must be made easily available to the public in sufficient quantity to assure statistical relevance. If your organization's transparency information is not easily available to the public via the internet, they will go instead to existing, easier to access websites, even if they are less accurate or reliable.

Most reviews on third party websites are only created by those with an extreme patient experience; patients with more moderate experiences rarely make their voices heard online.

This preponderance of extreme feedback on third party websites makes obvious the need for a statistically relevant quantity of patient feedback in order to avoid your organization's online reputation being skewed by a handful of patients with extreme, non-typical experiences.

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In your transparency data, negative feedback must be made public alongside positive feedback in order to build up trust with the public. The desire to hide negative feedback is a natural one, but it is ultimately counterproductive in the long term because it hides existing problems in your organization and prevents the needed focus on improvement. With transparency, your physicians will be more aware of how their patients view them and make changes to their processes if needed. Also, having only positive reviews available to the public makes them less likely to trust your organization as it will look like you are misleading the public. There is always some portion of patient feedback that is unusable without changes due to legitimate problems such as containing patient information, obscenities, or libelous information. These edits should be kept minimal and be noted so as to keep the integrity of your program intact.

As our country and industry move toward a more patient-centered, cooperative model for providing care, transparency is a logical step toward the improvement we all seek. However, transparency is more than a data or technology issue. Ultimately, it requires cultural change and buy-in across several internal teams. Doctor.com, an industry leader in provider directories, has developed an approach enabled by technology that allows your organization to start from wherever you are, build momentum, and ultimately have the platform and flexibility to innovate as transparency in healthcare evolves.

## Setting Up Your Transparency Solution

Organizations that can see the benefits of transparency should move rapidly in that direction; patients are already getting poor and inaccurate information from existing third party websites, so the lack of a transparency solution is already causing damage to their online reputations. Plus incomplete use of patient feedback may be concealing problems within organizations without a transparency solution, but making negative information about their organization publicly available is a difficult prospect for some to accept.

Transparency is at its foundation about trust. Trust by the physicians that data is going to be managed in a way that is fair and beneficial to their reputations and practice. Trust by executives that data will be used to better connect the organization to those it seeks to serve. Trust by the public that the data presented isn't skewed to make the organization look better than it is. And even trust by important third parties like Google so they are willing to use the information in helping users find what they're looking for.

59% of people say online reviews are “somewhat” to “very important” when making decisions.

JAMA - FEBRUARY 2015

The best way to gain trust in using patient feedback data is to make not only the data transparent, but make the structure, process, and approach for the initiative transparent as well. This is where governance comes into play; a good governance plan can help build a foundation of trust from the outset. Your governance plan covers issues like who will be administering the transparency solution, how the information is collected, how to resolve disputes of patient feedback by physicians, and the guidelines that patient feedback must meet, such as freedom from obscenities, to be available to the public.

Of course, what you develop initially for your governance plan may change over time with more input from these various stakeholders, and that's expected. The point is actually having the processes and guidelines for your transparency solution formalized and available. In fact, we suggest a solid governance policy should include ongoing review and iteration as part of its structure; the web and the healthcare industry are constantly changing, so flexibility is needed to stay on top.

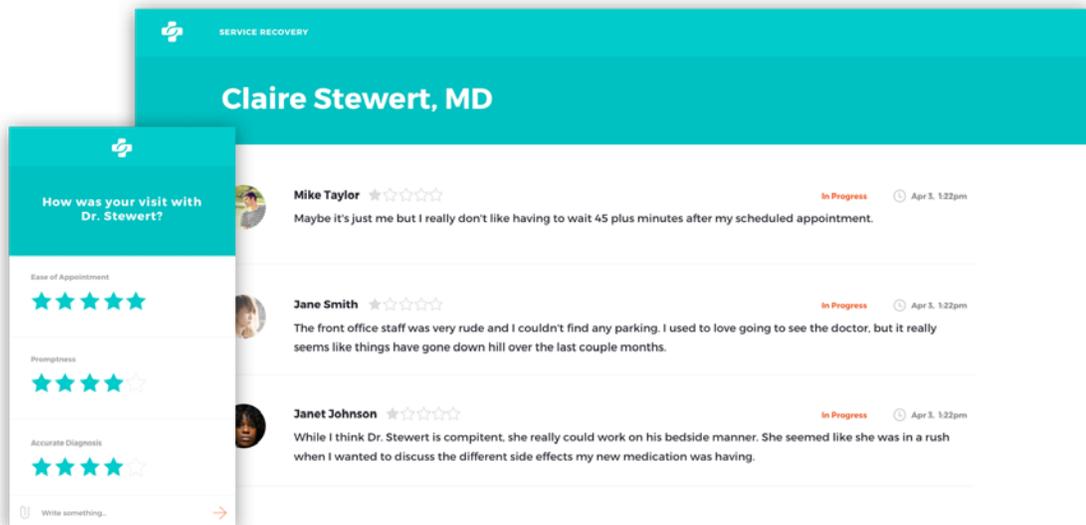
Trust and transparency in the process leads to continued innovation, increases your ability to go to market quickly, and maintains your competitive advantage by staying flexible and aware of the changing realities of the industry. Every organization should have Transparency Governance Model moving forward.

## Culture: Build Internally Toward Public Transparency

Every organization is in a different place in its journey toward transparency. However, you can learn from organizations who have gone before. From the experiences of these trailblazers, some best practices that have emerged for gaining the momentum and change needed to see transparency implementation through to completion. These best practices are as follows:

### ASSESSMENT

Are you surveying at the physician level? Do you have at least 30 ratings per doctor for statistical relevance? What are your current ratings when converted to a five-star display? Chances are physician survey data will show a better rating than third-party sites.



Example of the Transparency Solution

## INTERNAL COMMUNICATION & TEST GROUP

The process of getting physicians accustomed to this type of reporting begins with a version of your transparency solution in which physicians can see only their own ratings and comments. This gives physicians the chance to get comfortable with the system before it becomes visible to the public or even to their colleagues internally.

Strategic, well-timed communication strategy is the backbone of any change management process. The same holds true with helping your organization become transparent. You must know what message you'll present to the various audiences such as physicians, physician leadership, and executives as well as the public. Who delivers these messages and in what format is also important; internally it shouldn't be marketing delivering the communications, but physician leadership and executives. Don't forget messaging to the public! Make sure you have a cadence for your communication that releases relevant details at appropriate times and reinforces those messages in multiple formats and settings.

Depending on your organization, beginning with a small pilot group may help work out kinks in governance and gain buy-in from physician champions. Often, simply showing physicians their reputations on the major third-party national sites as a comparison to the internally generated patient feedback is enough to help them see the benefits. This phase typically lasts one month.

## FROM BLINDED TO VIEWABLE

Before going public with your data, doing an internal launch allows your organization to further engage with the initiative as well as to develop systems and habits for performance improvement before worrying about public exposure. It is imperative that during this phase you are able to offer training, classes, coaching, and mentoring to any providers that are struggling with their scores. This phase typically lasts two to six months.

## EXTERNAL

When doing a public launch, ensure search engines like Google are able to pick up your data. This requires a careful and thoughtful approach to microdata on your provider profiles. You can learn more on [schema.org](http://schema.org).

Use this launch to drive improvements in your physicians' performance as now your physicians are keenly aware of the importance of the patient feedback data and can directly see changes in it based on their actions. Additionally, make sure the data is presented in numerous ways to maximize access and use by consumers. Service line roll-ups are a good example here.

The screenshot displays a 'FIND A PROVIDER' interface. It features a teal header with a logo and the text 'FIND A PROVIDER'. Below this, there are two physician profiles. The first profile is for Dr. Sean T. Alder, a male doctor with glasses, wearing a white lab coat and a stethoscope. His profile includes a circular profile picture, a '4.2' star rating with five stars and a partial sixth, and a bar chart showing the distribution of ratings. The bar chart shows approximately 67 ratings: 5 stars (45%), 4 stars (35%), 3 stars (15%), 2 stars (3%), and 1 star (2%). Below the chart is a 'View all comments' link. To the right of the profile picture, the text reads 'ACCEPTING NEW PATIENTS', 'Dr Sean T. Alder', 'Surgery, Cardiology', 'Address: Vena Cava Heart Center, 755 Commerce Dr., Decatur, GA 30030', and 'Contact: (800) 572-2665, info@corp.doctor.com'. The second profile is partially visible, showing 'ACCEPTING NEW PATIENTS', 'Therine Atworth, MD', 'Contact: (800) 572-2665, info@corp.doctor.com', and 'Pediatrics'.

External view of Physician Ratings

## ONGOING MONITORING AND IMPROVEMENT

For areas you are trying to improve, ensure you have benchmarks and metrics. Whether using actual performance numbers or patient acquisition, decide what the criteria will be in advance so those involved can know how they will be graded. To know the real return on the initiative, put systems in place to track results over time. Additionally, track reputation across the major third party physician review websites to help determine if your efforts are having an effect beyond the borders of your website.

## How is Transparency Governance Implemented?

Successfully implementing a Transparency Governance model requires a culture shift for most organizations. This means having executive sponsors, physician champions, and project champions is extremely important. There must be planned, strategic communication along with phased roll-outs of the transparency solution, as well as open discussion about the success metrics of the program. The benefits are not obvious to everyone immediately, so the more champions you have for your cause, the faster and more effectively you will get your transparency solution up and running.

### PEOPLE AND RESOURCES

Commitment of people and resources to defined roles and responsibilities. Assigning the right people and appropriate resources to transparency allows is essential for building trust and ultimately a culture of transparency.

## PROCESS

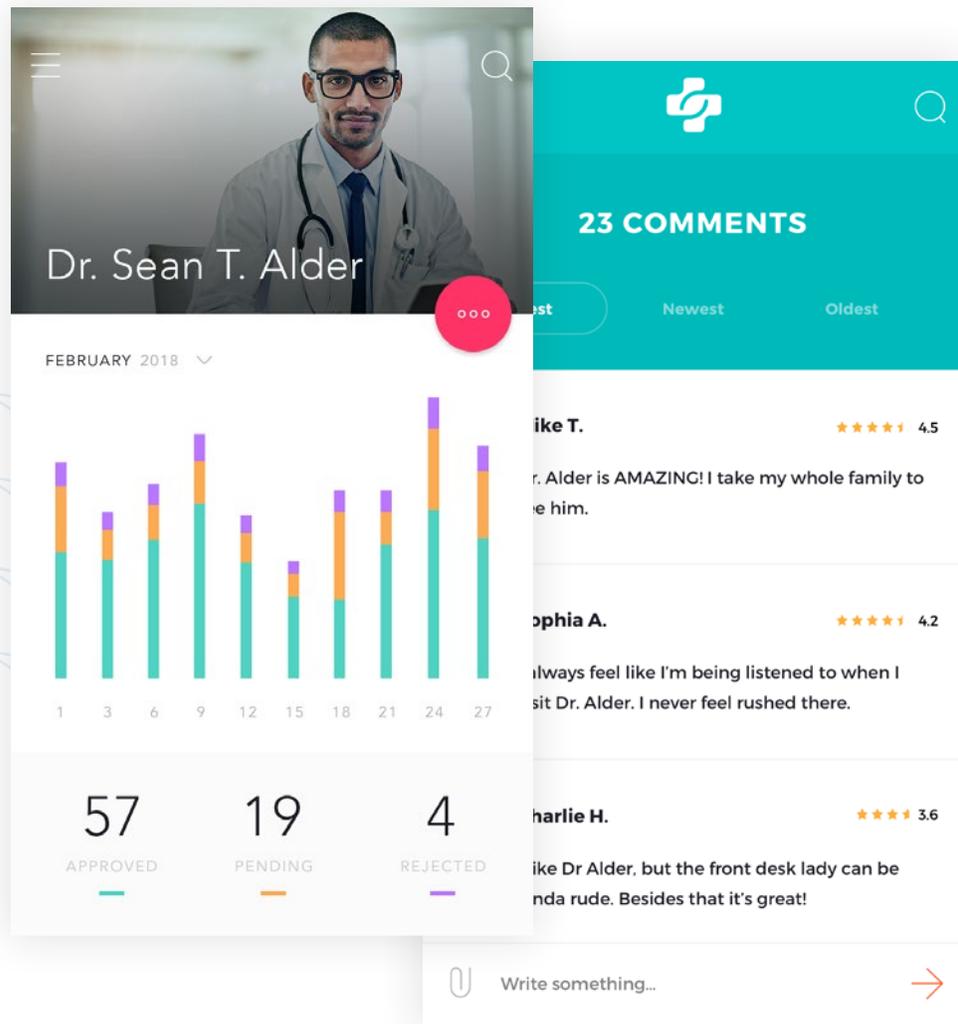
You need to have processes outlined for phased roll-outs of transparency, managing of disagreements in data and rules, and ongoing reviews of the process and communication of the overall program successes among other issues. The scope of the governance model must include all components of how new transparency initiatives will be phased in roll-outs, how disagreements among stakeholders will be resolved. You must also factor in when and how the program will be reviewed to ensure continued success and communication of the results within the program. Always make sure to have a comment review team look at every comment before posting. No algorithm is good enough to catch everything.

## RULES & FORMULAS

How will the data be formulated into something useful to the audiences using it? Especially in healthcare, raw data and useful framing of data are important and complex topics. The data must be detailed enough to be useful, but also presented such that it is easily understood and digested by the public. Also there are security concerns such as HIPAA which must be kept in mind. There should be not only consensus around how the data will be moved from raw form to public form, but continued review to ensure the transparency program is serving its intended purpose to empower decision-making for everyone.

## STANDARDS

Guidelines must be developed for how and where to present transparency data both to the public and internally. From brand and design style guides to technical requirements to stated end goals (perhaps based on use cases), there is a broad range of standards that can be part of a governance model. Standards help define technology methods, web presentation approaches, and even what data is needed to support the program's goals.



## What Are The Keys to Transparency Success?

If a transparency project is to be successful, it will require the organization to take an intentional approach. The best approach could be called the “surround sound” approach, where the message and focus of the transparency initiative is heard from all angles in the organization.

### EXECUTIVE SPONSOR

In order to successfully implement the culture change required by a transparency program there must be executive support. Transparency is at the core a strategic vision for how an organization will partner with its community to improve health. An engaged executive leader is critical to ensuring successful implementations, accountability, and ongoing momentum in the program.

### PHYSICIAN LEADERSHIP

Physician leadership can help rally your physicians around the benefits of what can seem to be a scary initiative for many. Not only that, but by engaging these leaders, you’ll ensure the governance model includes the provider perspective as well.

## PHYSICIAN CHAMPION

The champion(s) may also be the physician leadership, or it may be a handful of influential physicians that are a part of your organization but not officially leaders themselves. They may also be some of your non-employed physicians, which can be very helpful in encouraging physician buy-in and even referral preference as they begin to see the benefits of your programs on their practice.

## COMMUNICATION

When implementing a transparency program and governance model, it's important that communication is well-planned. From the initial communication to your organization sharing what's coming, deciding who should deliver the message, and in what settings to share it, to explaining the benefits, timing, and what will be expected of the various stakeholders-communication needs to be a thoroughly thought-out component of the plan.

## SCOPE

Too often, the scope of a governance model is limited to how things like patient comments will be vetted. In order to develop a successful transparency governance model, there must be an end-to-end view of the project goals and objectives. Without this holistic view, a governance model will fail to deliver the highest goals - patient acquisition and performance improvement. This means considering all angles for how data can be used to empower decisions, from internal use to organizational digital properties and 3rd party tools.

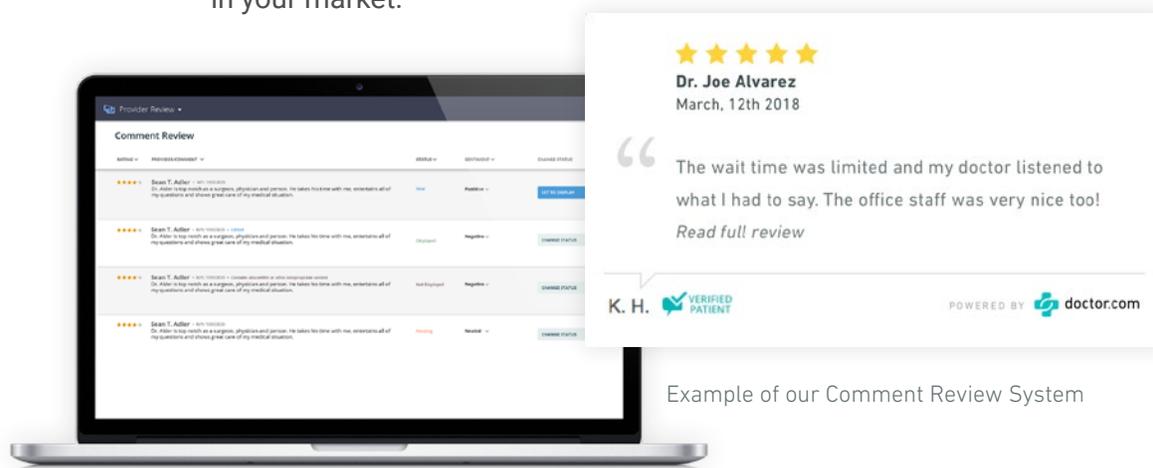
## Streamline the Process

There are a lot of steps needed to get an organization ready to efficiently handle their patient experience data in this new way.

1. The data needs to be accessible. Depending on your survey vendor and how you're storing that data currently, you may need to ask for a new feed of data or contract for the rights to use that data for transparency.
  2. Determine how you'll convert that data into a consumer-friendly rating, review comments, and determine which ones are acceptable for posting online, which aren't, what edits must be made prior to posting online, and mark any which require more discussion.
  3. Convert the raw data from data into HTML with Microdata for the web and even potentially
  4. Consider how you'll use the aggregate data for service line roll-ups or other strategies online.
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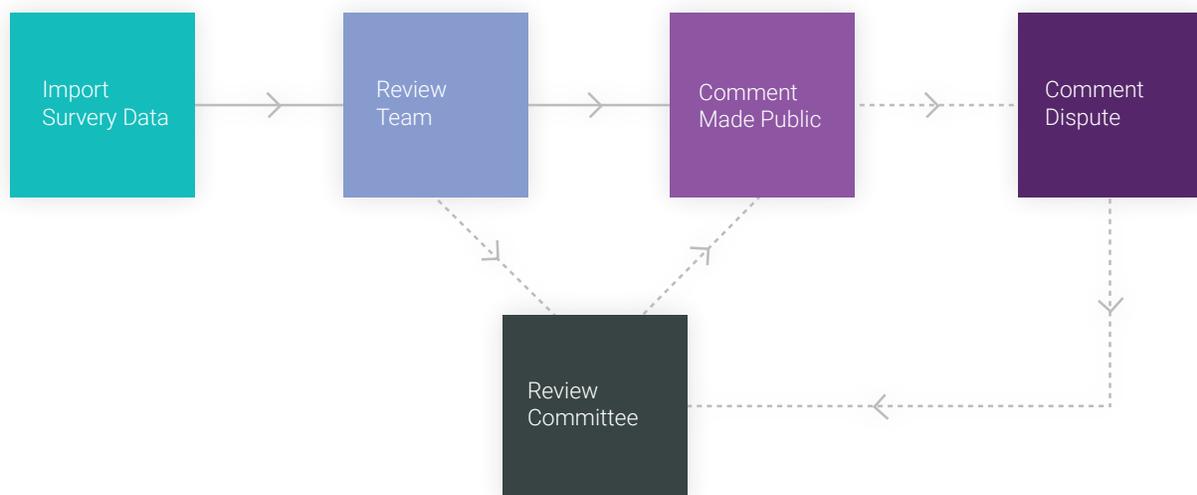
Doctor.com has worked with clients through all of these processes to allow the technology to streamline each of these components. Trying to manually work with this data through spreadsheets and emails can be overwhelming and cause the initiative to falter. While some organizations have built systems internally to make this work more manageable, you'll need to consider if you have the ability to dedicate ongoing resources to this kind of technology build-out. These tools are constantly evolving and new business needs drive the need for continuous innovation.

Doctor.com offers the ProviderConnections Transparency Solution as web-based software allowing healthcare providers to manage and promote physician ratings and related patient comments on their organization's website. The tool helps organizations combat the questionable and limited data already online at various third party websites by using trusted data to provide healthcare consumers with relevant, quality reviews and comments that showcase the actual quality of care provided. By populating it with robust data, your website will be a source of truth for credible physician reviews and patient experience data in your market.



Example of our Comment Review System

ProviderConnections Transparency Solution seamlessly imports MD Survey, CGCAHPS, HCAHPS, or other survey data and converts them to mean scores expressed as star ratings, ranging from one to five, in addition to specific comments made by patients. The tool allows for streamlined data updates to ensure that the results are current. Plus, optional rules can be set to require a minimum number of ratings (such as 30 per physician) before any will post, allowing a customizable level of statistical rigor. These can be set to use a rolling twelve or twenty-four month set of data. ProviderConnections offers an interface to first allow individual providers to view their own data, followed by broader publishing that enables anyone within your organizations intranet environment to review all provider data as part of the implementation process. Through these stages your physicians can first get comfortable with the new system and the transparency data before it is visible to the whole organization, and again before it is visible to the public.



When posting stars and comments on your website, a work flow system is needed to manage the influx of information, which needs to be processed, edited, and approved before it is made public. The ProviderConnections system works with you and your survey vendor to convert performance scores for each physician into a five-star system like those of the national review sites. An overall patient rating score is calculated for each physician based on an average of provider-related measures. Doctor.com works with you to determine what data sets and star-calculation methodology works best for your organization's needs. Posting every rating and comment, except those violating patient confidentiality or containing obscenities, helps patients get an accurate understanding of the quality of care.

ProviderConnections facilitates careful monitoring of patient comments to ensure that Protected Health Information (PHI) and obscenities are filtered. All comments go through an automated review, which marks comments with potential obscenities or PHI as "flagged." Authorized users can edit comments to remove inappropriate content while preserving the overall comment. Additionally, all comments must be approved for public viewing before they are visible to anyone other than the system administrators, meaning all comments have to be read by at least one person before they are publicly available.

In addition to managing your internal patient feedback with the ProviderConnections Transparency Solution, Doctor.com also offers our Reputation Monitor to keep track of what patients are saying about your organization on other websites. It regularly surveys major third party websites and collects comments and reviews about physicians, facilities, etc, and then presents that information in a variety of easy to understand formats. It also generates alerts if it detects a rating below a set threshold.

This allows you to easily track how your organization is reviewed online, detect trends in reviews over time, and identify physicians who receive consistently excellent or poor reviews on these third party websites.

While such information is not as pertinent or statistically relevant as your internally generated patient feedback, these websites are often used by prospective patients despite their inadequacies and should be monitored. Reputation Monitoring will also let you gain traction for transparency as they see existing scores and comparison. It also has an ongoing use for identifying trends for areas of improvement.

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## THE IDEAL TRANSPARENCY SOLUTION INCLUDES

- Documented governance model based on best practices to drive internal commitment from key stakeholders
  - Online Reputation Management platform to manage major third-party physician review sites such as Healthgrades, Vitals, Yelp, Google and RateMDs
  - A plan to move from internal transparency to an external launch
  - Import of comments and star ratings
  - Algorithm for pre-flagging patient comments containing obscenities, inappropriate remarks, and potential PHI
  - An internal “Find a Doctor” system to allow individual physicians to review their own ratings as well as internal-only transparency data
  - A process for importing patient experience data into an existing physician directory with microdata
  - Collaboration with your marketing/web/IT teams for search engine optimization (SEO) to drive traffic as well as site analytics to measure impact
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Hopefully you now have a better idea of how to start developing a transparency solution at your organization, now it's time to get working. In your download package you should have received a set of worksheets to aid your organization in appraising your readiness for incorporating transparency. The worksheets will help decide who will be involved, what departments will take part, and some of the infrastructure issues like measuring success and communication models. Once completed, these worksheets should help your organization lay the groundwork for implementing transparency.

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## About Us

Doctor.com is the first platform built to help healthcare providers deliver a better customer experience at every step of the patient journey. Doctor.com's industry-leading data management technology has enabled unique integrations with the most prominent healthcare directories, search engines and social media platforms. As a result, more than 20,000 healthcare organizations have been empowered by the platform to enhance their digital presence and credibility, increase patient trust, and grow their business. Doctor.com was founded in 2012 and is headquartered in New York City.

For more information, visit:

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