

TITLE: Factors Influencing Patient Selection of Orthopedic Surgeons

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**BACKGROUND:** As patient access to consumer review websites, medical provider information available on the internet, as well as direct consumer healthcare advertising have increased, elective orthopedic surgery has become more patient and market driven. Physicians believe their appearance on social media and online review websites can affect their patient volume. This study aims to identify factors that may influence patient preference in selecting an orthopedic surgeon.

**METHODS:** Cross-sectional study involving 5 multispecialty orthopedic surgery groups. 328 patients who sought treatment by 6 different orthopedic surgeons were asked to anonymously answer a questionnaire consisting of 25 questions, regarding demographic information, importance of specific criteria regarding the selection of their orthopedic surgeon (four-point Likert scale); and questions to determine opinion on 13 different review internet sites.

**RESULTS:** Across all ages, 79% of respondents selected it was very important that the surgeon be covered by their insurance. Out of pocket cost was very important to 66% and moderately important to 19% of the respondents. Only 39% of the respondents searched for information about the doctor on the internet. Recommendations from family or friends to the surgeon was moderately or very important to 61% of respondents while recommendations from other physicians was moderately or very important to 82% of respondents. The ability to make an appointment online was not important to slightly important in 70% of respondents.

Surprisingly, the importance of internet reviews was between 21-29% in each category of importance. The institution where the surgeon trained was only very important in 25% and moderately important in 30% of respondents. Advertisements by the surgeon were not important in 62% of the responses obtained.

The surgeon's website was visited by 49% of respondents, followed by the website of the office or surgical group at 27%. Other websites visited include webmd.com by 26%, yelp.com by 20%, healthgrades by 16%, and ratemd.com by 15% of respondents.

**CONCLUSION:** Our findings suggest that insurance coverage, insurance network coverage, and out-of-pocket cost are very important in patient's choice of their orthopedic surgeon. Despite advances in technology and availability of information, patients still value the recommendations of other physicians, family, and friends significantly more than internet reviews of orthopedic surgeons. When stratified by age, physician internet review websites were more often used by younger patients. Only 40% of respondents searched the internet for information on their surgeon prior to their first appointment. Websites most often visited were the surgeon or group's web page, webmd.com, and yelp.com. Interestingly only 5% of patients who searched the internet for information on their surgeon visited the state medical board website. Television and print advertising played little to no role in choosing a surgeon for the majority of patients surveyed. Patients' rising role in health care provider selection makes understanding elements that affect their decision imperative.

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