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Morris doctors rated on Net, but postings anonymous

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KAREN MANCINELLI / DAILY RECORD

Dr. Cory Golloub gets a high-five from patient Nathan Lindsay, 6. Golloub got an average rating of five out of five on a Web site called RateMDs.com. He specializes in internal medicine and pediatrics.

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RateMDs.com Web site urges its users to 'take ratings with grain of salt'

BY WARREN BOROSON
DAILY RECORD

His patients seem to adore Cory Golloub, an internal medicine physician and pediatrician in Montville.

A "fantastic doctor," wrote one.

Another wrote: "What a blessing he is to our family. ... A doctor that definitely goes the extra mile. We love him!"

A third comment: "He is the best."

A fourth: "Smartest doctor I've met."

Eleven people have rated Golloub, giving him an average rating of five out of five, the top score, on the Web site www.RateMDs.com, where people can evaluate doctors on their punctuality, helpfulness and knowledge.

Golloub received a 4.3 on punctuality, but that score isn't counted in the overall rating.

When asked for his reaction, Golloub said, "I just treat people the way I would want to be treated. As if they were my parents or my children. That's the most important thing.

"Handholding is as important as the prescription. 'Healthy' doesn't just mean physically, but emotionally, too."

Some 325,387 ratings can be found on the Web site, of which 3,231 are for New Jersey doctors.

Most of the ratings come from just one or two people, so they are not especially reliable.

The largest number of ratings for one physician: 82.

Because people submit the ratings anonymously, there is no way to tell if they are patients of the doctor, not friends. Or -- in the case of negative reviews -- rivals.

In a question-and-answer section on the Web site, readers are urged to "take the ratings with a grain of salt."

"Remember, we have no way of knowing who is doing the rating -- the doctor, other doctors, patients, cats, dogs, etc."

Many physicians and dentists in Morris County are rated, most of them highly.

But a few ratings are harsh.

Lauren M. Cooper, a dermatologist in Morristown, received an overall rating of 1.9 from 11 people.

One wrote: "I found her to be a fine dermatologist; however she was extremely rude. I felt I was very rushed and that she really didn't care at all."

Another wrote: "Consistently rude, although you'd hardly realize it because she spent a whole three minutes with me."

A third: "Dr. Cooper is one of the rudest people I've ever encountered."

A fourth: "Mean spirited and inept."

Another: "Barely made eye contact. Didn't seem to care at all. Don't go to her."

Still, one person was full of praise: "Dr. Cooper was extremely helpful and successful in treating a skin condition I had. So helpful that I would and have referred her to others."

Cooper did not return three phone messages asking for her comments on the ratings.

Another dermatologist at Cooper's practice, Affiliated Dermatologists, also received an unusually low rating.

One doctor lavished with praise was Allan Dunkel, a psychiatrist in Kinnelon, who received an average rating of five from 10 people.

"He really did save our marriage," wrote one person.

Wrote another: "There should be more like him: smart, kind, caring, good-looking, funny and not selfish."

Wrote one woman: "Extremely bright, charismatic. Very animated in marriage counseling. Would go right at husband."

Kenneth Zahl, a pain management specialist in Rockaway, received an average rating from five people.

But one of them wrote: "Would not listen to me . . . "

The comment also said Zahl is being sued by patients, which is not true, although his license was temporarily suspended last year by the state Board of Medical Examiners on charges that he had violated board orders restricting his medical and billing practices.

Another patient, injured in an auto accident, wrote: "Fantastic doctor ... I have this man to thank that I can still live as normal a life as I can given the extent of my injuries."

Zahl said he had not seen RateMDs in a while, but he remembered that an angry patient who had not paid her bill had maligned him.

The Web site should check with primary sources before publishing defamatory reports, he said.

An orthopedist, Steven Dorsky of Chatham, received three negative and one favorable comment.

A negative person wrote: "Extremely rude."

A positive person: "Friendly."

Dorsky did not return a request for comment.

The Web site lists the specialties of physicians, what insurance their patients have used, even -- in a few cases -- their e-mail addresses.

The founder of the Web site, John Swapceinski, has founded similar sites, such as RateMyTeachers.com, and is starting sites devoted to lawyers and veterinarians.

RateMDs has been in existence for more than three years. The site is free.

How many ratings of a doctor are enough to persuade a reader to pay serious attention?

Ten, Swapceinski said.

But very few doctors have as many as 10 ratings.

On the subject of lawsuits, the Web site states that a federal law permits "many entities to 'host' other people's content without being liable for defamation/libel, etc."

The Web site also says the U.S. Supreme Court has held that "anonymity of speech" is protected under the Constitution.

Here are other Morris County physicians who received top ratings from at least four people, and a sample comment:

- Craig Bissinger, OB/GYN, Parsippany: "He has to be the best OB/GYN around."
- Gary Safier, family medicine, Randolph: "Extremely thorough and a great diagnostician."

Safier said he didn't know about the high rating but said he was pleased.

He added that it's extremely important for doctors to listen to their patients carefully.

"There's so much you're able to determine by just listening. You can sometimes uncover the underlying issues when you get a really good history. I never give short shrift to my patients."

He has been practicing for 37 years and has treated the parents and sometimes the grandparents of some of his patients.

- Carl Wallach, gastroenterology, Mountain Lakes: "I saw two other gastros before I saw him and he is by far the best."
- Kenneth Adler, blood disorders, Morristown: "What an incredibly kind and compassionate doctor."

Adler said, "I didn't even know about (the Web site), but I know I'm not perfect.

"I started in Morristown 30 years ago, so I have a long track record. And I've been blessed with a lot of support from my associates and colleagues.

"It's true that I may have a skill in communicating with patients and giving bad news, which is something we often have to do."

The president of the Morris County Medical Society, Dr. Steven A. Maser of Dover, did not return a phone call asking for comment on the rating system. He is not rated by rateMDs.com.

But Judith Martin Waterman, manager of publications at the Medical Society of New Jersey, said, "People must be very careful about the Web sites they choose. Some are very good, and some are not."

She recommended that people looking for doctors go the state society's Web site at www.msnj.org and click on "Physician Finder."

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