

Assessing Patient Satisfaction Following Blepharoplasty Using Social Media Reviews

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Abstract

Background: Because patient satisfaction is a significant qualitative consideration in measuring aesthetic surgery outcome, it is important to characterize the individual factors that shape the patient perspective about blepharoplasty.

Objectives: This study analyzed reviews by blepharoplasty patients on the aesthetic surgery social media platform RealSelf.com to determine which aspects of the surgical process have the most significant impact on patient satisfaction.

Methods: Blepharoplasty reviews were gathered from RealSelf.com with an automated web crawler. These reviews were characterized as positive or negative, then given a specific category that more specifically defined the theme of the review. Additional variables, including the specialty of the reviewed physician and any patient self-reported ratings, were documented.

Results: A total of 1991 reviews pertaining to blepharoplasty were collected. Among reviews with self-reported “worth it” ratings, 93.5% were positive. Following categorization of all reviews, 1865 (93.7%) were positive and 126 (6.3%) were negative. Of the positive reviews, the most common overall themes were bedside manner (n = 899, 48.2%), aesthetic result (n = 859, 46.1%), and overall comfort (n = 58, 3.1%). Among negative reviews, most pertained to aesthetic result (n = 100, 79.4%), and bedside manner (n = 14, 11.1%). The most frequently encountered physician specialties performing blepharoplasty were plastic surgery (n = 1101, 55.3%), ophthalmology (n = 634, 31.8%), and otolaryngology (n = 69, 3.5%).

Conclusions: The majority of reviews were positive. The most prominent factor driving positive reviews was bedside manner, followed by aesthetic results. Negative reviews were most frequently attributed to suboptimal aesthetic results. Most blepharoplasties in our study cohort were performed by plastic and oculoplastic surgeons.

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Blepharoplasty is a popular facial plastic procedure performed for both aesthetic and functional indications. The Aesthetic Society reported that in 2020 blepharoplasty was the most common eyes, ears, or nose procedure with approximately 85,712 surgeries performed in the United States, costing an estimated average of \$2,994 per procedure.¹ Given the cosmetic impetus for surgery, patient outcome relies on qualitative measurements of patient satisfaction.^{2,3} Aesthetic surgeries can directly impact patient quality of life through improved body-image, elevated self-esteem, and alleviation of symptomatic depression.³⁻⁷ Compared to other cosmetic procedures,

one study demonstrated relatively low patient satisfaction rates for blepharoplasty, estimating a patient satisfaction rate of 73%, whereas other popular cosmetic procedures

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such as abdominoplasty and reduction mammoplasty had satisfaction rates of 93% and 92%, respectively.⁸

Over the last decade, social media has become an increasingly important aspect of plastic surgery, with both surgeons and patients utilizing social media platforms. Surgeons can benefit from this popular avenue for marketing and patient engagement, and prospective patients can obtain valuable information about potential providers.^{4,9,10} In 2015, a 500-patient survey of one plastic surgeon's clinic demonstrated that 95% of patients used the internet to collect information before consultation and 40% of patients were influenced by social media when deciding on a particular surgeon.¹⁰ As such, plastic surgery practices have been encouraged to monitor their online reviews because negative comments can seriously damage a surgeon's reputation.¹¹⁻¹⁴

RealSelf.com (Seattle, WA) is a social media platform facilitating patient-patient and patient-surgeon interaction in the field of cosmetic procedures. The website has over 9.9 million monthly users who can post and browse physician reviews, before-and-after photographs, and other basic information such as location and cost.¹⁵ Furthermore, patients can post anonymously, limiting potential bias and better reflecting patient experience, providing a substantial degree of detail which can be effectively studied to more fully ascertain the patient perspective.^{11,16} Patient reviews can have a direct impact on other consumers. For example, a single clinic saw a 30% annual growth in its aesthetic case volume following a positive RealSelf review, with several patients referencing that particular review at their visit.¹⁵ The purpose of this study was to evaluate patient satisfaction following blepharoplasty and the underlying positive and negative individual factors that drive overall satisfaction based on social media reviews.

Our primary aim was to ascertain the proportion of positive blepharoplasty reviews and the most frequently cited reasons for positive or negative sentiment. Our secondary aim was to characterize additional aspects, including physician specialty and cost, in the context of the blepharoplasty patient experience described on social media.

METHODS

Reviews posted under the topic "eyelid surgery" on RealSelf.com were collected with the automated Python-based web crawler Scrapy (White Plains, NY) from January 2019 to May 2021. Specific variables extracted for each review included the review title, review date, patient-reported "worth it," and cost. The number of stars for rating different categories on a scale of 1 to 5 were also gathered, including: overall rating, "doctor's bedside manner," "answered my questions," "aftercare follow-up," "time

spent with me," "phone or email responsiveness," "staff professionalism and courtesy," "payment process," and "wait times." Additional factors gathered included physician specialty, number of people who rated the review as "helpful," number of pictures associated with the review, and each review entry's title and main text. To better facilitate comparison between specialties, reported physician specialties were grouped into 5 main specialty categories, namely: plastic surgery, ophthalmology, otolaryngology, oral and maxillofacial surgery, and other or unspecified specialties.

Each review was individually evaluated by the authors and labeled as either a positive review or a negative review, then further classified into a more specific primary category that better describes the main rationale for the positive or negative review. Reviews often include additional secondary reasoning for being positive or negative along with the primary reason. As a result, when these additional secondary reasons were provided in the review, they were further counted as secondary categories. Thus, for each category, 2 percentages were calculated: primary percentage for proportion of respective positive or negative reviews where the category was the primary reason, and overall percentage for proportion of respective positive or negative reviews where the category was the primary or secondary reason. Our experience, based on analyzing each review, suggested there were very few reviews that could theoretically be defined as neutral because they all generally expressed some sentiment regarding the patient blepharoplasty experience, and we felt that the addition of a neutral category would add an extra layer of subjectivity to this analysis when determining when a review was truly neutral instead of positive or negative.

Positive categories included bedside manner, aesthetic result, comfort, improved vision, cost, and office. Bedside manner included comments about the surgeon being a good listener, personable, reassuring, explained procedure in detail, and generous with their time. Aesthetic result included minimal scarring, stitches not being too prominent, and having a natural look. Comfort included manageable pain levels postoperatively. Office included positive office experiences such as aesthetically pleasing décor, short wait times, and friendly support staff. Negative categories included appearance/outcome, bedside manner, logistics and cost. Appearance/outcome included prominent scarring, stitches, epiphora, worsening of vision, unnatural appearance, persistent ptosis, and asymmetry. Bedside manner included negative comments about the surgeon's overconfidence, lack of empathy, rushing patient encounters, and not addressing patient concerns regarding negative results. Logistics included negative office experiences such as long wait times and uncomfortable surgery centers.

Table 1. Positive and Negative Review Categories

Category	Primary reason (number)	Secondary reason (number)	Overall number	Primary %	Overall %
Positive	1865				93.67
Aesthetic result	859	210	1069	46.06	57.32
Bedside manner	899	303	1202	48.20	64.45
Comfort	58	171	229	3.11	12.28
Cost	1	29	30	0.05	1.61
Improved vision	45	15	60	2.41	3.22
Office	3	48	51	0.16	2.73
Negative	126				6.33
Appearance/outcome	100	2	102	79.37	80.95
Bedside manner	14	22	36	11.11	28.57
Comfort	1		1	0.79	0.79
Cost	8	9	17	6.35	13.49
Logistics	3	3	6	2.38	4.76
Total	1991				

RESULTS

A total of 1991 blepharoplasty reviews were collected from RealSelf.com and analyzed. Reviews were categorized by the patient's expressed overall positive or negative sentiment regarding their experience (Table 1). Of the 1991 total reviews, 1865 (93.7%) reviews were positive and 126 (6.3%) were negative. Among the positive reviews, the most frequently cited primary reasons were bedside manner ($n = 899$, 48.2%) and aesthetic result of the procedure ($n = 859$, 46.1%). Among negative reviews, the most frequently cited primary reasons were appearance or outcome of the procedure ($n = 100$, 79.4%) and bedside manner ($n = 14$, 11.1%). Among the most frequently cited overall reasons for a positive review, bedside manner ($n = 1202$, 64.5%), aesthetic result ($n = 1069$, 57.3%), and comfort ($n = 229$, 12.3%) were found to be the most common. For the most frequently cited overall reasons for a negative review, appearance/outcome ($n = 102$, 81.0%), bedside manner ($n = 36$, 28.6%), and cost ($n = 17$, 13.5%) were the most common.

Patient review ratings evaluated several metrics, with 5 stars corresponding to the highest possible rating and 1 star corresponding to the lowest rating, as shown in Table 2. Overall, the vast majority of patients ($n = 1793$, 90.0%) gave the highest overall rating of 5 stars for their doctor. Beyond overall rating, the most commonly cited reasons for a 5 out

of 5 rating were "answered my questions" ($n = 413$), "staff professionalism and courtesy" ($n = 410$), "payment process" ($n = 409$), and "doctor's bedside manner" ($n = 408$). The most frequently cited reasons for the poorest rating of 1 out of 5 were "aftercare follow-up" ($n = 15$), "answered my questions" ($n = 12$), "doctor's bedside manner" ($n = 11$), and "wait times" ($n = 11$).

Table 3 summarizes the effect of a physician's primary specialty of training on their patient ratings. Most blepharoplasties in our study cohort were performed by plastic surgeons ($n = 1098$), followed by ophthalmologists ($n = 634$), and other or nonspecified specialties ($n = 176$). Overall, 5-star ratings were frequently reported for oral and maxillofacial surgeons ($n = 11$, 100.0%), ophthalmologists ($n = 599$, 94.5%), and plastic surgeons ($n = 1018$, 92.7%).

A total of 1009 reviews provided a "worth it" rating. Among these reviews, 943 (93.5%) patients stated that their blepharoplasty was "worth it," 39 (3.9%) stated that their blepharoplasty was "not worth it," with the remaining 27 (2.7%) stating "not sure." Moreover, 311 reviews provided photographs taken during the preoperative and/or postoperative stages, and 1680 did not. In terms of cost, 291 reviews (14.6%) posted the cost of their blepharoplasty. Among these reviews, the average blepharoplasty cost was \$5,257, ranging from \$200 to \$20,000. These additional parameters are summarized in Table 4.

Table 2. Five-Star Review Categories and Ratings

Category	Rating (number of stars)						% of 5-star reviews of starred reviews
	1	2	3	4	5	NA	
Overall	75	15	6	22	1793	80	93.8
Doctor's bedside manner	11	6	3	13	408	1550	92.5
Answered my questions	12	3	6	8	413	1549	93.4
Aftercare follow-up	15	6	4	16	391	1559	90.5
Time spent with me	11	6	4	23	397	1550	90.0
Phone or email responsiveness	9	2	6	18	399	1557	91.9
Staff professionalism and courtesy	8	4	3	19	410	1547	92.3
Payment process	7	3	3	11	409	1558	94.5
Wait times	11	3	13	38	374	1552	85.2

NA, not available.

Table 3. Physician Specialties With Associated 5-Star Ratings

Physician specialty	Total	Number of 5-star ratings	% of 5-star ratings
Otolaryngology	69	62	89.86
Plastic surgery	1098	1018	92.71
Oral maxillofacial surgery	11	11	100.00
Ophthalmology	634	599	94.48
Other specialty	176	104	59.09

DISCUSSION

Patient satisfaction is a significant aspect of perceived overall success following facial plastic surgery operations, encompassing many components including preoperative encounters with the surgeon and their staff, experiences immediately before and after surgery, and the postoperative recovery course. This is especially important for assessing blepharoplasty, a surgery that can not only improve aesthetic appearance but also restore functional vision.¹⁷ As a result, studying qualitative data such as reviews has the potential to provide unique insight into the patient perspective, drawing from crowd-sourced information to better understand areas that can be further improved along with areas where the practice is currently performing well.¹⁸ Reviews posted to RealSelf.com contain a particularly robust set of details, which were examined in this study to further elucidate the underlying characteristics of positive and negative patient perspectives following blepharoplasty.

Patient reviews indicating that blepharoplasty was “worth it” amounted to 93.5% of the 1009 valid reviews that gave a “worth it” rating, very closely matching the 93.7% positive sentiment determined by the authors when categorizing every review. Schlichte et al demonstrated that patient reviews posted to social media generally better reflect true patient perceptions of satisfaction regarding a procedure, so the high proportion of positive findings among the patient reviews examined in our study shows that blepharoplasty overall results in a high satisfaction rate among patients.^{19,20}

In our study, the most frequently given reason for a positive blepharoplasty experience was surgeon bedside manner, followed closely by aesthetic result. This is indicative of the importance of patients feeling well-cared for during the entirety of their clinical encounter. As can be seen in the literature, patient satisfaction with their procedure can be heavily dependent on subjective perception of interpersonal interactions and how well their expressed needs were addressed by their physician.²¹⁻²³ For example, in the context of cleft palate surgery, overall patient satisfaction has been found to have a stronger association with how well the patient and family feel cared for by their physician than objective measurements of surgical outcome.^{24,25} As such, it is fairly evident that many reviews only briefly mention the aesthetic results, instead focusing on the positive patient-physician relationship developed in the course of the preoperative and postoperative experience. Notably, bedside manner constituted the majority of secondary categories, signifying that bedside manner is frequently brought up in reviews even when it was not the primary rationale for a positive experience. These findings raise the concern that excellent bedside manner may have the potential to mask poor surgical outcomes, thereby

Table 4. Additional Review Statistics

Variable	Frequency
Patient worth it	
Worth it	943
Not worth it	39
Not sure	27
NA	982
Photographs provided	
Yes	311
No	1680
Cost	
Cost provided	291
No cost provided	1700
Mean	\$5,257
Median	\$4,500
Minimum	\$200
Maximum	\$20,000

NA, not available.

jeopardizing patient safety. However, although positive bedside manner appears to be a critical component of the patient experience, aesthetic result is still a significant factor, being the second most frequent primary and secondary category. Numerous studies have been conducted on how best to evaluate optimal patient appearance and aesthetic outcome following surgery.^{26,27} Several tests have been specifically utilized for measuring blepharoplasty outcomes, including through directed postoperative questionnaires and objective measurements of facial landmarks in pre- and postoperative photographs.²⁸⁻³⁰ To this end, the most commonly referenced reason for a negative review was a poor aesthetic appearance or outcome, indicating poor surgical outcome as the principal impetus for posting negative reviews. It is likely that patients generally expect positive aesthetic results following blepharoplasty, with exceptional bedside manner completing their memorable pre- and postoperative experience and therefore being the highlight of any positive review. Nonetheless, our findings further emphasize the importance of these multifaceted components of the clinical encounter and the critical role of the surgeon both inside and outside of the operating room. Although optimal operative performance and final appearance are always paramount, mindful pre- and postoperative management to ensure overall patient satisfaction with the care they receive for their blepharoplasty is just as significant a consideration.

Analyzing 5-star overall ratings provided by each review may be more sensitive for assessing patient sentiment because many fewer reviews were missing star ratings than “worth it” ratings. When applying a strict criteria of 5-star overall ratings being positive and 4-star or lower ratings being negative among reviews which provided an overall rating, 93.8% were 5-star, demonstrating concordance with both the authors’ manual assessment and the patient’s self-assigned “worth it” rating. Moreover, although secondary ratings were overwhelmingly positive, with most being greater than 90% 5-star, the only secondary rating below 90% was for wait time at 85%, with prolonged wait times being a known common complaint for patient clinical encounters.^{21,31} In addition, although just 15% of reviews provided the cost of the procedure, the \$200 to \$20,000 range (mean, \$5,257) of given costs from our sample of reviews reflects the overall average cost of \$4,120 for blepharoplasty in 2020 according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.³²

Plastic surgeons, ophthalmologists, and otolaryngologists are the most frequently referenced specialties for performing blepharoplasties.³³ Although oral maxillofacial surgeons had the highest overall patient satisfaction rating based on all their reviews having 5-star ratings, there were very few instances of oral maxillofacial surgeons performing a blepharoplasty, hence it was difficult to ascertain the significance of this finding. Plastic surgeons performed the great majority of blepharoplasties in our study cohort, consistent with prior research showing plastic surgery performing the most outpatient cosmetic operations, including blepharoplasty, compared with other specialties.³⁴ Of note, among the most commonly cited specialties for performing blepharoplasty, ophthalmologists achieved the highest overall rating, followed by plastic surgery and otolaryngology. This may potentially be due to ophthalmologists performing a greater proportion of blepharoplasties for functional rather than aesthetic reasons, leading to more clearly defined positive patient benefits following a successful operation.³³ Nevertheless, the percentage of overall satisfaction was otherwise fairly similar between those specialties. Additionally, specialties outside of plastic surgery, ophthalmology, otolaryngology, and oral maxillofacial surgery, including dermatology and unspecified specialties, had a much lower overall patient satisfaction. This points to the benefit of experience with operating on the face among those specialties and being able to display a high level of confidence and familiarity with performing this procedure which can further benefit the patient-physician relationship.^{23,35}

This study has several limitations, including potential bias due to overrepresentation of overtly positive and negative reviews by patients especially motivated to share their experiences on a social media site. Furthermore, it is possible for surgeons to influence the proportion of online reviews by exclusively targeting patients with positive outcomes to

post online, or exceedingly motivated patients posting repeat positive or negative reviews, potentially skewing these results. However, RealSelf employs a dedicated content moderation team to independently verify each review's authenticity and assess for potential conflicts of interest before the reviews are published, serving to mitigate the effects of these events.³⁶ Moreover, RealSelf's policy also explicitly prohibits physicians from unilaterally eliminating negative reviews, curtailing another source of possible bias.³⁶ Another limitation of this study is that RealSelf.com characterizes all blepharoplasties under the topic "eyelid surgery." As not every review included the specific type of blepharoplasty performed, this categorization limited the authors' ability to distinguish between upper and lower blepharoplasties which have variant levels of invasiveness, indications, and postoperative outcomes.³⁷ There is substantial variability in the amount of detail and quality of information provided, with fewer than half of the reviews providing a "worth it" rating. Although the structure of each review was fairly standard, neither overall star rating nor a "worth it" rating were required for each review, hence the presence of some reviews that lacked definitive patient indication of their sentiment about the experience. In addition, the subjective nature of each individual patient review may make it difficult to draw conclusions that can be generalized to the overall blepharoplasty patient population.

Despite these limitations, the large sample of reviews considered in this study should mitigate potential concerns about external validity as a significant detracting factor. Moreover, as a social media platform dedicated to discussing aesthetic surgery procedures, RealSelf.com provides increased depth of data such as the ratings system directed towards various aspects of the clinical encounter and the ability to post before-and-after photographs, with every review directly linked to a verified physician profile. In this manner, dedicated procedure-focused social media sites such as RealSelf.com maintain a robust range of information that can more fully illuminate the patient perspective on blepharoplasty. Our study utilized an organic, crowd-sourced approach to assess patient sentiment regarding blepharoplasty directly from patients through their reviews posted on social media, demonstrating that many patients highly value a strong interpersonal connection with their surgeon. These findings further emphasize physician qualities such as patience, empathizing with patient concerns, and availability during the postoperative course, which can be just as important as optimal aesthetic outcomes on influencing perception of a positive blepharoplasty experience.

CONCLUSIONS

This study utilized patient reviews posted on the RealSelf.com social media platform to identify factors associated

with positive and negative blepharoplasty experiences. Physician bedside manner and aesthetic result were the most commonly provided reason for a positive review. Poor postoperative appearance or outcome was the most commonly given reason for a negative review. Blepharoplasty was overall reviewed positively by patients. Our findings emphasize the important responsibility of the surgeon to establish a strong patient-physician relationship for patients undergoing blepharoplasty, and the critical role that interpersonal relationships play in driving overall patient satisfaction with blepharoplasty.

Disclosures

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