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Lawyers issue formal warning to rate-your-GP website

By **Steve Nowotny**

A controversial new website which allows patients to rate their GP today received a formal warning from one of the country's top libel law firms.

Carter-Ruck solicitors, acting on behalf of a group of 37 doctors, has written to Dr Neil Bacon, the founder of www.iwantgreatcare.org, expressing 'grave concerns about the potential for inaccurate, irresponsible and defamatory allegations being published on the website.'

The letter details a number of concerns relating to the site's comment-moderation policy and warns: 'We put you on formal notice that if one of our clients is defamed on your website and instructs us to take action, a copy of this letter will be made available to the court at the appropriate stage in the proceedings.'

'The court's attention will be drawn to the fact that we have raised our concerns about the risks involved and have reminded you of the need to put robust structures and procedures in place to ensure that no doctor is libelled on the site at any stage.'

The www.iwantgreatcare.org site enables patients to search for GPs and hospital doctors across the UK and rate them according to three measurements: 'Do you trust this doctor?', 'Does this doctor listen?' and 'Would you recommend this doctor?'. Patients are also able to leave anonymous comments.

More than 2,500 patients rated their doctor in the first day since it was launched - and while some have given rave reviews, others have posted comments which have caused uproar among GPs.

A disgruntled patient in west London complained yesterday that his GP 'provided the worst service I have experienced under the NHS' and 'clearly just wanted me out of his surgery so that he could run off to his weekend.'

'He dismissed my symptoms, jumped to impulsive and incorrect conclusions and insulted me,' the complaint continued. 'He was thus useless, obnoxious and I was obliged to switch immediately to a different GP.'

The [BMA](http://www.bma.org.uk) has heavily criticised the site warning 'there is a significant possibility of it being used in a malicious way.' Concerns have also been raised about the database of doctors listed on the site. Many doctors have been listed without their knowledge,

while others, such as GPC chair Dr Laurence Buckman and health minister and surgeon Lord Ara Darzi, do not appear to be listed - although this may be because listings attracting 'malicious' comments are automatically suspended.

Dr Bacon - a hospital doctor who previously created www.doctors.net.uk – said he was unable to comment on the Carter-Ruck letter for legal reasons. But he insisted systems were in place to remove any defamatory comments and said the response to the site had been overwhelmingly positive.

'There's a noisy minority who don't see the benefits of progress here, but a far, far larger number of doctors from all levels, primary care and secondary care, junior and senior, who are saying it's fantastic, this will help me and it will help the patients themselves,' he said.

'In my mailbox the number of people thinking it's a great idea outnumber those who don't by roughly seven or eight to one.'

Pulse revealed last month that the Government-run [NHS Choices](http://www.nhs.uk/choices) website is to trial a system to allow patients to rate their GP practice online by the end of the year.

But patients will not be able to rate individual GPs because of the potential for defamatory and racist comments, and the site employs 16 members of staff to monitor user feedback, a spokesman said.