Survey finds continued economic stress for ASCs

Although economic difficulties have started to ease in some areas of the US, many ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs) are still feeling the pinch, according to the 23rd annual OR Manager Salary/Career Survey. More than one-fourth (28%) of respondents say economic conditions have caused financial difficulties for ASCs primarily because of changes in reimbursement (76%, up from 67% in 2011), declines in elective surgery (71%, down from 83% in 2011), and lack of available credit (16%, essentially unchanged from 17% in 2011).

ASC managers continue responding to economic conditions as they have since 2009: reducing overtime (43%), requiring staff to take time off without pay (39%), and eliminating open positions (20%).

Of total respondents, 78% of nurse managers say RN staff turnover stayed the same compared with 12 months ago, and 82% say ST staff turnover stayed the same. Nearly half (42%) found it more difficult to recruit experienced RN staff, up from 37% in 2012, although the average number of weeks for an open RN position was 6 weeks, down from 9 weeks last year.

About the survey
Data for the OR Manager Salary/Career Survey was collected from March to May 2013. The survey list comprised 990 nurse managers of ASCs who were either OR Manager subscribers or part of an external list. The survey was closed with 189 usable responses—a 19% response rate. To ensure representation of the target audience, results were filtered to include only the 181 respondents who work full time in an ASC. The margin of error is ±6.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. This article features the staffing findings from the survey. The rest of the findings will be reported in the October 2013 issue.

As in previous years, most respondents (43%) work in physician-owned ASCs, followed by joint venture (21%), corporate or LLC (21%), and hospital-owned (11%) facilities. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of ASCs are multispecialty. The most common types
of single-specialty ASCs are ophthalmology (35%), gastroenterology (25%), and cosmetic/plastic surgery (14%).

Half (50%) of respondents’ ASCs are in suburban settings, with 33% in urban and 14% in rural locations.

**Turnover and open positions**

Staffing is stable at most ASCs, with 75% of managers reporting no open FTE RN positions, and 23% reporting 1 to 3 open positions. Most managers (83%) also report no open ST positions, and 11% report only 1 open position.

ASC managers have an average of 0.4 RN (the same as 2011, after a small increase to 0.8 in 2012) and 0.2 ST (unchanged from 2012) open positions. Positions stay open an average of 6 weeks for both RNs and STs, compared with 9 weeks and 8 weeks, respectively, in 2012.

**Future challenges?**

Most respondents say that recruiting experienced RN staff is the same (45%) or more difficult (42%) compared with 12 months ago; for STs, 54% report recruitment is the same and 30% say it’s more difficult. Although managers report that open positions mostly stayed the same for RNs (71%) and STs (80%), it should be noted that only 9% reported a decrease in the number of open positions for either role. Perhaps factors such as an aging workforce and implementation of health care reform may affect ASC staffing in the future. ✤

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