Survey suggests signs of improvement in ASC environment

Surgical volume is stable or increasing in nearly two-thirds of ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs), according to the 23rd annual OR Manager Salary/Career Survey. More than two-thirds (68%) of survey respondents also report that their ASCs have not experienced financial difficulties as a result of current economic conditions. These results may be signs of improvement in the ASC environment.

Other key findings of the survey include:

• In all, 25% of respondents report a decline in surgical volume in the past 6 months, compared with 30% in 2009. Nearly half (48%) say it remained the same, consistent with 2009 and 2011, and 25% say it increased, compared with only 19% in 2009.

• Slightly more than one-fourth (28%) of managers say their ASCs have experienced financial difficulties because of current economic conditions. Most of those managers (76%) cite changes in reimbursement as the source of difficulties, followed by decline in elective surgery (71%) and lack of available credit (16%).

• Only 11% of respondents say their annual operating budgets decreased in the past 6 months.

• The average salary of an ASC manager is $92,300, continuing an upward trend from $89,300 in 2012 and $88,500 in 2011.

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 compensation and management findings from the survey. Results from the staffing portion of the survey appeared in the September OR Manager.
ASC overview
Consistent with past surveys, most respondents (62%) work in multispecialty ASCs, with 36% in single-specialty centers. Most single-specialty ASCs specialize in ophthalmology (35%), gastroenterology (25%), cosmetic/plastic surgery (14%), or orthopedics (12%).

Most ASCs (43%) are owned by physicians, followed by joint venture (21%), corporate-owned (21%), and hospital-owned (11%) arrangements. Half (50%) of ASCs are based in suburban areas, 33% are in urban areas, and 14% are in rural locations. The average annual case volume is 4,320.

Compensation data
ASC managers earn an average salary of $92,300, which is $27,700 less than the $120,000 average earned by their hospital counterparts. The median salary is $85,900.

Average total compensation, which includes salary, benefits, and bonuses, for ASC managers is $111,000; that’s $36,000 less than the average $147,000 earned by hospital OR leaders. The median total compensation is $100,000.

ASC managers who work in joint venture or corporate-owned facilities earn more in salary and in total compensation than their counterparts in physician-owned ventures. Managers in the Northeast earn the most compared with other geographic regions.

Managers working in multispecialty centers earn more (average salary of $98,900 and average total compensation of $121,000) than those who work in single-specialty facilities (average salary of $81,300 and average total compensation of $121,000) than those who work in single-specialty facilities.

Respondents who hold the title of administrator or administrative director earn more than those with the title of nurse manager. As expected, respondents who oversee 5 or more ORs earn more than those responsible for fewer ORs.

Raises and bonuses. ASC respondents received an average raise of 3.8% this year, higher than the 3.3% for hospital leaders. However, that gap has narrowed from the average raises of 4.1% (ASC) vs 2.8% (hospital) in 2012. Only 14% of ASC respondents received their raise as part of a promotion or change in job responsibilities.

Far more ASC leaders (72%) than hospital leaders (46%) received bonuses in the past year, but their checks were likely lower: The average bonus for ASC managers was $6,580 compared with $8,830 for their hospital-based counterparts.

Benefits. Consistent with past results, ASC managers receive fewer benefits than their colleagues who work in hospitals. Discrepancies in life, dental, eye care, and disability insurance, as well as lower pensions and tuition reimbursement, are especially noteworthy. And differences of more than 10 percentage points between this year and last year were seen for life insurance benefits at ASCs (64% in 2013 vs 76% in 2012) and educational benefits (32% in 2013 vs 49% in 2012).
Only 3% of respondents say they have lost benefits in the past.

**Work environment**
Survey results provide a glimpse into the work environment of ASC managers.

**Number of ORs managed.** Respondents oversee an average of 3.6 ORs, the same as in 2011 and similar to 3.8 in 2007. Respondents in joint venture facilities oversee the most ORs (5), followed by corporate-owned (3.3) and physician-owned (3.0) facilities. Consistent with past surveys, managers in multispecialty ASCs oversee more ORs (4.3) than those in single-specialty facilities (2.4).

**Manager scope and role.** ASC managers report they supervise, directly or indirectly, 23.6 full-time equivalents (FTEs)—an average of 19.5 clinical FTEs and 4.1 nonclinical FTEs. That compares to a total average of 123.0 FTEs for hospital leaders—an average of 99.0 clinical and 24 nonclinical FTEs.

Most respondents (31%) hold the title of administrator or administrative director, followed by nurse manager (24%), clinical director (20%), and director of nursing (18%).

In all, 43% of ASC managers report to administration, up from 28% in 2011. Reporting structures receiving more than 30% of responses are physician owners (41%), board of directors (36%), and medical directors (32%). Only 7% of respondents report to a corporate office. Some respondents gave multiple answers.

**Budget.** The average ASC annual operating budget is $6.7 million, but few managers responded to this question with a number, making analysis difficult. In 2010, the average operating budget was $4.7 million. ASC managers in joint venture facilities have the highest budget ($6.5 million), followed by corporate-owned ($4.8 million) and physician-owned ($4.7 million) centers.

Slightly more than half (54%) say their budgets stayed the same in the past 6 months, and 13% report an increase.

**Purchasing power.** ASC managers yield major influence over the selection and purchase of OR supplies and equipment (87%) and OR capital equipment (79%). Nearly half (47%) say they use that influence as a committee member, 38% say they are the primary decision makers, and 28% serve in an advisory capacity.

**Satisfaction.** ASC managers are satisfied with their positions, reporting an average of 4.2 on a 5-point scale (with 5 being “very satisfied,” and 1 being “not satisfied at all”). In all, 41% of respondents say they are very satisfied, 40% rate their satisfaction as 4, and 14% rate it as a 3. Only 4 respondents rate their satisfaction as 2, and none selected 1.

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**Benefits comparison: ASC vs hospital**

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Profile of ASC managers
Every leader is unique, but the survey results provide insight into the typical ASC manager.

Most ASC managers are women (88%), and 90% of respondents who are ASC managers are RNs. Most respondents (34%) live in the South, followed by 24% in the Midwest, 23% in the West, and 17% in the Northeast.

Age and experience. The median age of respondents is 53 years, older than the median age of 45 for all RNs reported in the 2008 National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses. The average age is 52, slightly older than the 50 years reported in the National Council of State Boards of Nursing and the Forum of State Nursing Workforce Centers 2013 National Workforce Survey for RNs.

ASC managers bring a wealth of experience to their jobs, reporting an average of 26.4 years in nursing (10% have 40 or more years of experience, and only 4% have fewer than 10 years of experience). Respondents have held their current position an average of 10 years.

Education. Nearly half (43%) of respondents report a bachelor’s as their highest degree. The second most common is an associate degree (22%), followed by a master’s (15%) and diploma (12%). Among hospital respondents, 48% hold a master’s degree.

As in 2012, about half (53%) of ASC managers’ employers require a specific degree for their positions, compared with 72% for hospital respondents. Of those ASC employers who require a degree, 70% specify a bachelor’s degree, 17% require an associate degree, and 8% require a master’s degree.

Forward momentum
ASC managers may be starting to see improvement in the marketplace, but many changes, such as ongoing implementation of healthcare reform, make for a cloudy path ahead. ❖

—Cynthia Saver, MS, RN

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