ASC survey respondents see more pluses than minuses in compensation

Surgical volume is up in nearly half (44%) of ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs), according to the 24th annual OR Manager Salary/Career Survey. To put this in perspective, consider that in 2009 only 19% of respondents said volume had increased and as recently as last year, only 25% reported an increase.

Another bright spot was higher earnings for ASC leaders. The average salary this year was $107,000, compared to $92,300 in 2013, and total compensation was $126,000, compared to $111,000 last year. Although increases have occurred over the past few years, this was the largest jump.

That’s not to say ASC leaders aren’t facing challenges, notably those related to the Affordable Care Act (see p 29). Of particular concern are low-premium, high-deductible insurance plans that people are purchasing without fully understanding how they work. “The high-deductible plans are creating havoc,” says Martha Colen, MBA, BSN, CASC, administrator of the Virginia Beach Ambulatory Surgery Center in Virginia Beach, Virginia. “We have an increased number of cases, but a decreased revenue for those cases we are doing.”

More highlights
Other key findings from the survey include:
• Only 20% of respondents reported a decrease in surgical volume over the past 12 months, and 16% said their volume had increased by 10% or more.
• Compared to 2013, the annual operating budget increased for more than one-fourth of ASC directors and managers.
• ASC leaders continue to earn less than their hospital colleagues and have a less robust benefits package.
• ASC directors and managers who supervise more ORs and work in a joint venture business arrangement earn more than their counterparts who supervise fewer ORs and work in physician- or corporate-owned facilities.

Compensation
The average salary of $107,000 (median $101,000) for ASC leaders is $16,000 less than the average of $123,000 earned by their hospital colleagues. However, the gap is narrower compared to the $27,700 from 2013.
Many survey respondents cite high level of job satisfaction

This year’s OR Manager Salary/Career Survey posed the question, “What are some of the reasons you chose a career in ASC management, and have your expectations been met?” Among the 80-plus responses, the positive far outweighed the negative, although there were some disappointments. Better hours, a smaller work environment compared to the hospital setting, and the fast pace were frequently cited as benefits of the ASC environment. Here is a sampling of comments:

- ACS management is the best of both worlds. Providing high-quality patient care, yet giving the staff time to provide high-quality family time. There is a good balance between the two.
- After 30+ years in an inpatient hospital setting, I wanted a change and more efficiency, less red tape, and less waste. My only regret is that I did not go to an ASC sooner.
- Chose ASC because of the case types and the smaller, more family-type of environment. Love the attention we give our patients. Disappointed in owners for not keeping up with increasing pay scales for nurses and not offering pay increases in the last 3 years.
- Fast-paced. Expectations have been met. I have been more involved in financials and insurance reimbursement compared to when I worked in the hospital environment.
- Focused around surgery, open 5 days/week, no weekends or holidays, which gives me time for family. Work closely with physicians and work with very reputable management company. All expectations have been met. I love my job!
- I chose ASC management for the challenge of a new position. I have consulted on other ASC projects and taken on the responsibility of two ASCs for the past 1 1/2 years.
- I have done management the majority of my career. I wanted to move from a hospital environment to outpatient care. I find the ASC more rewarding in the personalized care that is given to both patients and staff.
- I like the size of the ASC, the challenges it provides, the camaraderie of staff, and the patients’ great experiences in being cared for at a smaller facility. My expectations are being met, and things are improving all the time.
- Less bureaucracy and I like working in a smaller setting. Expectations have been met.
- The reasons I chose a career in ASC management are flexible hours, set hours, no holidays or week ends, and more controlled settings compared to hospital, which allow for better outcomes for the patients, physicians, and staff members.
- Was looking for a change from the hospital environment and wanted more autonomy and better working hours. Most of my expectations have been met.
- I like the fast-paced environment. Enjoy working with the physicians since it is a joint venture. They have a lot of incentive to be more cost conscious and efficient. I love my job.
- Wanted change from managing all surgical services at acute care hospital.
- Worked in a hospital setting and was frustrated with the failure of systems to allow for smooth flow of patients. ASC was great solution and I was excited to be a part of it.
- I began in 2003 as the office manager with no ASC experience. I enjoy the challenges as no day is ever dull or the same. But things seem to be more challenging with more and more surgeons becoming employed by hospitals.

Fewer than five respondents had entirely negative comments. For example:
- Expectations have not been met. Compensation not equal to job done or to certifications obtained. Frustrating.
- The career chose me; there is not enough respect from the surgeons or the ASC industry for the role administrators play in the ASC industry.
Wages, bonuses, and benefits add up to an average total compensation of $126,000 (median $120,000) compared to $149,000 for those working in a hospital setting, a difference of $29,000, compared with $36,000 in 2013. Those in the West earn the most, followed by the South, Northeast, and Midwest.

**Raises.** ASC respondents reported their last raise averaged 3.6%, comparable to last year’s 3.8%. Those in the South reported a substantially higher average raise (6.4%) compared to those in other regions of the country, which ranged from 2.7% to 3.3%. Raises were also higher for ASC leaders working in single-specialty vs multispecialty facilities (4.6% vs 3.5%) and for those working in physician-owned facilities (4.4%, compared to 3.8% for corporate and 3.4% for joint venture).

**Benefits.** Overall, ASC directors and managers continue to receive fewer benefits than their hospital counterparts. Although ASC leaders are more likely than hospital leaders to have a 401(k) retirement plan, far more often the discrepancy in benefits is not in their favor. For example, only 52% of ASC leaders have disability insurance, compared to 68% of hospital leaders.

### ASC leaders on the job

All respondents work full time, with an average work week of 47.3 hours. Overall, 29% work 50 to 54 hours a week, and 27% work 45 to 49 hours. The average work week was fairly consistent across geographic regions, type of ownership, number of ORs managed, number of specialties, and job title.

**Work setting.** Respondents were fairly evenly divided as to who owned the ASC, with 35% working in physician-owned facilities, 31% in joint venture, and 23% in corporate. The annual surgical volume average was 4,730 cases.

**Two-thirds work in multispecialty ASCs,** consistent with past surveys. The most common single-specialty facilities were ophthalmology (40%), orthopedics (26%), and gastroenterology (17%).

**Scope of the role.** More than half (56%) of respondents hold the title of administrator/administrative director, a considerable increase from 31% in 2013. The next two most common titles were clinical director (18%) and director of nursing (13%).

ASC leaders manage an average of 3.5 ORs and oversee an average of 26.5 full-time equivalents (FTEs), with those in the South supervising the highest average number of FTEs (32.4). As expected, those working in multispecialty ASCs oversee more employees (average of 31.4 vs 17). Those in joint-venture ASCs oversee more FTEs (33.2) than their colleagues working in ASCs owned by physicians (21.6) or a corporation (25.2).

**Budget.** ASC leaders and managers oversee an average operating budget of $5.87 million. More than half (51%) said that budget was about the same as 2013, with 26% reporting an increase and only 5% saying their budget had decreased.

### About ASC leaders

Based on survey results, ASC leaders are a highly satisfied group, reporting an average job satisfaction of 4.2 (unchanged from 2013) on a 5-point scale (with 5 being “very satisfied,” and 1 being “not satisfied at all”). More than one-third of respondents said...
they were very satisfied, and nearly half (48%) rated their satisfaction as a 4. No one reported being not at all satisfied.

These positive results were reflected in comments from participants (sidebar, p 25). For instance, one respondent wrote, “I’ve been working in ASC management since 1986. I love the fast pace and types of cases we do. Also, no call, weekends, or holidays.”

**Demographics.** Most ASC leaders are women (86%), and 71% are RNs. The average age is stable at 52.6 years (53 in 2013). In all, 44% of respondents are 59 years old or older.

Most ASC directors and managers hold a bachelor’s (39%) as their highest degree, followed by a master’s (22%), associate, and diploma. In 2009, 67% reported their highest degree as a bachelor’s, followed by 17% for a master’s.

**Optimism in the face of challenges**

ASC leaders face their share of challenges, but they remain satisfied with their chosen careers and are enjoying an uptick in salary and compensation. However, they are well aware of potential problems. As one ASC leader wrote, “Like the autonomy, fast-paced nature of the ASC, and the number of procedures that the ASC can offer without the major politics of the hospital. My expectations for management have been met, but I wonder how healthcare changes will affect the ASC.”

*Cynthia Saver, MS, RN, is president of CLS Development, Inc, Columbia, Maryland, which provides editorial services to healthcare publications.*

---

### Benefits comparison: ASC vs hospital

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits Comparison</th>
<th>ASC</th>
<th>Hospital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paid time off</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health insurance</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonuses/profit sharing</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>401(k) retirement plan</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental insurance</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life insurance</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye care</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability insurance</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent health insurance</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational benefits</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition reimbursement</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensions</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentive pay</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### In the past 6 months, the ASC’s volume has...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume Status</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remained about the same</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Respondents to ASC survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Get Your CE Credits!**

Each issue of OR Manager is preapproved for 3.0 nursing contact hours for registered nurses. To complete an online post-test and earn continuing education (CE) credits, simply login to www.ormanager.com and go to My Account. Click on “My Courses” and click into the issues. Need help? Contact clientservices@accessintel.com.

---

**About the survey**

Data for the OR Manager Salary/Career Survey were collected from April to May 2014. The survey list comprised 1,000 nurse managers of ASCs who were either OR Manager subscribers or part of an external list. The survey was closed with 111 usable responses—an 11% response rate. To ensure representation of the target audience, results were filtered to include only the 104 respondents who work full time in an ASC as a manager or director. The margin of error is ±9.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. This article reports compensation and management findings from the survey. Results from the staffing portion of the survey appeared in the September OR Manager.

We thank everyone who generously took time to complete this year’s survey and provide the information that will be of interest to our readers.