“Golden scalpel” awards cite OR achievements

If your OR could receive a “golden scalpel” award this year for an accomplishment, what would it be for?

Many responding to this question in the Salary/Career Survey simply said “recruitment and retention.” Others pointed to patient safety, quality improvement, and OR construction projects.

Here are some of their comments:

• **Recruitment and retention.** With experienced OR nurses hard to find, managers are trying new strategies.

  One organization had set up an elective in perioperative nursing for credit at the local university. Another would give the award to the orientation team, who created a “positive, progressive, orientation program” that keeps new employees interested. A manager from Arizona said the OR actually has a waiting list and morale is high, especially with a new unit-based council.

• **Dedication of staff.** A manager whose hospital has been under regulatory scrutiny wrote, that despite a couple of trying years, the OR “has a wonderful retention rate and a great case turnover time.” Another said the staff continues to be cohesive and give “excellent patient care in the face of diminished numbers and benefit reductions.”

  One manager of a 6-room OR was proud that her facility has achieved “total cross-training of all RNs” to be able to work intraoperatively as well as postoperatively for the same-day surgery unit. Central service and surgical techs were also cross-trained to sterile processing.

• **Process improvement.** Managers cited improvements in patient flow, block utilization, decreased turnover time, and a better record of on-time case starts. One OR improved its on-time start rate from 35% to 92%.

• **Patient safety.** Most often mentioned was the much-publicized correct-site surgery initiative of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations. The director of a 45-room OR in a teaching hospital termed “miraculous” the OR’s 99.8% compliance with the time-out policy for surgical site verification. “That includes nurses, surgeons, anesthesia providers, and residents,” she said.

• **Information technology.** Brief comments belie the time and effort of bringing a new automated system “live.” “The award should be for putting our half-million-dollar supply inventory on a computer system with par levels,” one manager commented. This 4-OR facility had also built case carts so supplies are charged for, decremented, and automatically reordered.

  “The challenge is trying to manage the supplies with the new computer system with no nonclinical support staff,” this manager added.

• **Construction and renovation.** Among projects that managers said they had shepherded were renovation of 10 ORs for new technology and construction of an integrated surgical suite. One community hospital had become the first such facility in its state in 30 years to establish an open-heart program.