Economic trends

Hernia, total joint volumes down

Three elective surgical procedures saw declines in early 2009 for a group of facilities participating in the OR Benchmarks Collaborative.

Hernia repair and total hip and total knee replacement volumes were down in January through July compared with the same period the year before. Declines were:

- Hernia repair: minus 7%
- Knee replacements: minus 11%.
- Hip replacements: minus 6%.

The data are from 12 months of data submitted to the collaborative by 130 US hospitals and 14 ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs). Of the hospitals, 88% were community facilities, and 12% were academic centers.

Geographic distribution was:

- North Atlantic: 32%
- South Atlantic: 28%
- Midwest: 16%
- West: 24%.

The recession and elective surgery

The impact of the recession on elective surgery has been hard to gauge.

As the downturn hit in late 2008, press reports quoted hospital execs as saying volumes of elective cases were falling, as people postponed care because of the loss of jobs and insurance.

In a survey by the American Hospital Association in March 2009, 59% of members had seen a moderate to significant decline in elective procedures.

OR directors interviewed by OR Manager in February 2009 reported uneven effects—for some, volume was down, but for others it was even or a little ahead.

In the 2009 OR Manager Salary/Career Survey, 30% of respondents from hospital ORs reported a decrease in surgical volume, compared with 24% in 2008. For ASCs, 90% had seen a decrease in elective surgery (October 2009 OR
Manager). (The hospital OR survey did not ask specifically about elective volume.)

In August 2009, Thomson Reuters reported hospital finances recovered somewhat in the first quarter of the year, based on benchmarking data from 522 hospitals. The report does not include elective surgery.

Other Thomson Reuters databases had not shown much change in elective surgery. Only in June and July did the company see a downward trend for elective procedures such as screening colonoscopy and knee arthroscopy, but the trend was not strong, according to a spokesman.

The OR Benchmarks Collaborative is a partnership of OR Manager, Inc, and McKesson that offers benchmarking on key performance indicators. More information is at www.orbenchmrking.com