Ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs) continue to feel the grip of a weak economy, according to results from the 21st annual OR Manager Salary/Career Survey. They also face changes in the health care landscape, with more consolidation, reduced reimbursement, and more physicians becoming employed by health systems.

Some of the responses to a question asking for accomplishments in the past year illustrate the mood. “Stayed financially solvent, stayed open for business, and retained more staff positions,” reported one manager. “Sustaining profitability in a declining economic environment,” wrote another. One simply replied, “Staying open!!!”

Compared to 2010, ASC managers say staff turnover and the number of open positions are about the same. However, more managers reported increased difficulty in hiring staff, particularly RNs.

Continuing a trend from 2009, the top responses to the slow economy were reducing overtime (43%), requiring the staff to take time off without pay (40%), and eliminating open positions (23%). For the first time, 8 respondents (2%) reported management layoffs; 12 (7%) reported layoffs of direct care staff.

About the survey
The OR Manager Salary/Career Survey was mailed in May to 1,000 OR Manager subscribers and an external list of nurse managers of ASCs. There were 198 usable responses for a 20% response rate. To ensure representation of the target audience, results were filtered to include only the 182 respondents who work full time in an ASC. The margin of error is ±6.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. This article reports on the staffing results from the survey. The rest of the results, including salary data, will be reported in the October 2011 OR Manager.

Similar to last year, most respondents (46%) work in physician-owned ASCs, followed by joint-venture (26%), corporate/LLC (15%), and hospital-owned (6%) facilities. About three-fourths (74%) are multispecialty facilities. The most common title for
respondents (37%) is administrator or administrative director, with 3 other titles nearly equally distributed: nurse manager (19%), director of nursing (18%), and clinical director (16%).

**Staffing stays stable**
Most ASC managers report “No vacancy” signs for RNs (74%) and STs (82%). At the time of the survey, managers reported an average of 0.4 openings for RNs and 0.3 open positions for surgical technologists (STs).

Open positions stayed about the same in the past year for both RNs (72%) and STs (85%). A few managers (13% for RNs, 7% for STs) reported higher numbers of open positions; 16% said open positions for RNs had decreased, twice the percentage who cited a decrease for STs (8%). Positions stayed open an average of 10 weeks for RNs and 6 weeks for STs.

Staff turnover stayed steady, with 80% of managers reporting it was about the same for RNs, and 82% reporting it was about the same for STs. Some managers noted increased turnover (13% for RNs and 11% for STs), and 7% said turnover for RNs and STs had decreased. One manager reported no turnovers in 2 years.

Many managers commented on accomplishments related to staff, such as “great teamwork,” “improved communication between staff members and with doctors,” and “improved orientation program.” One manager reported her most important accomplishment as “having a complete staff that is timely, professional and respectful towards patients and each other.”

**Recruitment challenges inch upwards?**
About half of ASC managers said recruitment of RNs (48%) and STs (51%) was unchanged from last year, but the percentage reporting more difficulty increased for
both RNs (43%, compared to 27% in 2010) and STs (33%, compared to 21% in 2010). Only 8% said recruiting RNs was easier and 16% reported having an easier time recruiting STs.

ASC managers’ willingness to hire new grads or nurses with no OR experience hasn’t changed. As last year, more than half (53%) say “no” to both. Less than half (45%) are willing to hire RNs without OR experience, and only 17% are willing to hire new nurse graduates.

**Seeking efficiencies**

In response to the economy, OR managers continue to work on improving efficiency. One manager listed the greatest improvement in the past year as, “run the facility efficiently, safely, and save company about $250,000 on equipment, implants, and supplies.” Other responses included using Lean management for OR supplies, streamlining the preop admissions process, and reducing turnover time. One manager reported “running two rooms simultaneously for eye surgeon, back to back, with two anesthesia providers.”

**Patients still safe, customers still satisfied**

Despite the challenge of a slow-to-recover economy, ASC managers are still making progress in safety and satisfaction. For instance, respondents commented they had initiated “safety huddles and checklists” and a “standardized time-out procedure.”

One manager noted his or her ASC “ranked #1 in patient satisfaction” compared to other ASCs in the US. Another reported “highest patient satisfaction scores.” These comments indicate ASC nurse managers are continuing to look for solutions to the operational and financial challenges facing their facilities while keeping an eye on quality and safety.

Other reasons for declining revenue: higher copays and deductibles for patients who still have insurance, a less intense flu season, and a lower birth rate. Observation stays are also up, which pay less than inpatient admissions.

—Cynthia Saver, MS, RN

**Thank you!**

*OR Manager* thanks those who generously took time to complete this year’s survey. We appreciate your part in gathering this information, which will be useful to your colleagues around the country.