Managing ORs in tough economic times

Of all the things that keep health care leaders awake at night, 3 stand out in these tough economic times—money, quality, and manpower. Surgical services leaders who understand these issues and can help their administration address them will be in a strong position to help their organizations survive.

As keynoter at the OR Business Management Conference May 20 to 22, 2009, at the Drake Hotel in Chicago, Connie Curran, RN, EdD, FAAN, will offer a perspective on the top issues and suggest approaches for addressing them.

In what she promises will be a “provocative and fact-filled” talk, Curran says she will offer positive suggestions in each area.

Curran is well known as editor emeritus of Nursing Economics. She is also president of Curran Associates, Chicago, a health care management consulting firm, and has been a health care executive and vice president of the American Hospital Association. She has led national studies on staff recruitment and retention.

Top worries

Curran outlined leaders’ top worries:

1. Money. For the first time, in the 2008 presidential election, both Republicans and Democrats called for health care reform. In calling for reform, policymakers want to make 3 changes that could have a direct impact on ORs—reduce cost, increase access, and improve quality.

   At the same time, hospitals are facing the headaches of the economic downturn. “Every state is in trouble, so they are looking at cutting Medicaid,” she says. Laid-off workers are swelling the ranks of the uninsured, already at 50 million. They are postponing elective surgery and diagnostic procedures, meaning they may show up later in the emergency room with more serious and costly illnesses.

2. Quality. Pay for performance is raising the focus on quality. “Some of the ‘never events’ (which insurers will no longer pay for) are directly related to the OR,” Curran points out.

   “Surgical services has been one of the places in the hospital that has been profitable. But these departments can lose money if services are not of high quality. Just looking at the SCIP measures is not enough,” she says, referring to the Surgical Care Improvement Project.

3. Manpower. Perioperative nurses and surgical technologists are in high demand. In many markets, there are shortages. Managers need to look at how to recruit and prepare replacements for the growing number of staff who are “chronologically gifted,” Curran says. Shortages of general surgeons and anesthesiologists are also factors.

Seminars and Breakouts

The OR Business Management conference, which will focus on financial management of the OR in the current economic environment, kicks off Wednesday, May 20, with 4 seminars on:

- Lean Principles for the Perioperative Environment
- Acquiring OR Technology In Tight Times
- Improving Patient Flow—Data, Processes, and Sustainability
- A Collaborative Journey to a Surgery Pavilion for the Future
Following on May 21 and 22 are 3 general sessions and 12 breakouts. Among topics are:

- The OR Business Manager’s Role in Perioperative Business Development
- Improving the OR Supply Chain
- Managing the OR Revenue Cycle
- Developing an Effective Anesthesia Program
- Going Green: Empowering an Environmentally Aware Culture
- Medical Device Pricing Transparency
- The Pebble Project: Health Care Design that Makes a Difference
- Aligning the OR Players to Develop a Prospering Surgery Program
- Minimally Invasive ORs: Considerations for Design and Construction
- Taming the OR Charge Description Master.

The conference brochure will be available in late January. Download the brochure and register online at www.ormanager.com