

BECKER'S ORTHOPEDIC & SPINE REVIEW

Business and Legal Issues for Orthopedic and Spine Practices

5 Best Practices to Improve Spine Efficiency in ASCs

By Nicola Hawkinson, MA, NP, CEO and Founder of SpineSearch

Spine surgery is performed with increasing frequency in ASCs around the country. As a result, ASCs are being forced to reexamine their approach to ensuring efficiency while maintaining appropriate levels of patient safety. The need to increase operating room efficiency is especially important given the current climate of rising costs and diminishing reimbursements. ASCs have been forced to reevaluate their current operations and develop strategies to maximize efficiency.

In contrast to other specialties, performing spine surgery with considerable efficiency can be extremely challenging. Spine procedures require a significant amount of expensive and unique equipment. Spine patients frequently place greater demands on ASC staff due to the complexity of their pathology. Employees of many ASCs may also be unfamiliar with nuances of spine procedures and caring for spine patients in the preoperative period. Thus, ASC administrators must invest significantly in training and education in order to maintain a smooth and efficient practice.

To maximize efficiency when performing spine procedures in an ambulatory surgery center, consider these five best practices and remember to think SPINE: Staff, Policies, In-service, Network and Evaluate.

Staff: The core of any organization is its employees. Your staff is undoubtedly your greatest asset. Spine procedures and techniques as well as patient care responsibilities may be unfamiliar to many ASC personnel. An investment in staff training and education is an essential part of improving efficiency and productivity. It is equally important to involve your staff in your plans to improve efficiency. Invite feedback from your staff. They know the issues of daily practice better than anyone else and can help improve workflow.

Policies: It is critical to develop standard operating procedures for all aspects of spine surgery, including preoperative evaluation, intraoperative case management and postoperative care. Create a manual detailing the manner in which your ASC intends to manage these complex patients. Such policies guarantee a consistent approach to patient care and provide a reference for staff to consult when necessary. Furthermore, the use of standard operating procedures ensures that different employees will complete the same task in the same manner.

In-service: Efficiency in your ASC cannot be accomplished without a commitment to staff education. Nurses, scrub techs and other staff members may not be familiar with complexity of spine patients, procedures and equipment. Before integrating spine surgery into your ASC, the staff requires a significant amount of education. Frequent in-services performed on a regular basis allow staff to remain up to date about new technology and surgical approaches. A well informed staff will quickly become an efficient staff.

Network: The administrators and management team of any ASC are as important as their employees in determining efficiency. It is critical to attend local and national conferences to learn the latest trends in ambulatory spine surgery. Current approaches to anesthesia, surgical techniques, pain management and patient care are rapidly changing. It is essential to stay up-to-date to maximize smooth and safe patient turnover.

Evaluate: The only way to maintain and improve efficiency is to continuously evaluate how your staff and ASC are performing. Develop clear and specific methods to assess your staff and make sure that they know the criteria on which they will be judged. In addition, regular reviews of the staff as well as overall efficiency will ensure a constant movement towards financial success and patient satisfaction. Most importantly, it is essential to integrate the data gained through performance evaluation into daily practice.

Spine surgery is a dynamic field. New developments, including minimally invasive techniques, require specialized equipment, implants, and training. As the treatment of spinal disorders continues to evolve, the ability to perform spine surgery with great efficiency will become increasingly challenging. Investing in staff training and education, developing standard policies and procedures, using frequent in-services, networking and constantly evaluating performance will ensure the smooth running of your ASC as well as high levels of patient safety. ■

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