Driving value through clinical assessment
How surgery centers are lowering costs and improving quality today

Meeting new challenges

Today, surgery centers must manage a daunting combination of rising costs, declining reimbursements and the need to improve the patient experience. Indeed, costs have continued to rise over the past 15 years, while reimbursements have decreased or remained the same.¹

To add to the challenge, reimbursements have become more closely tied to patient outcomes and satisfaction — which directly impact a surgery center’s brand reputation and ability to compete in the community it serves. In short, the patient experience is fast becoming a strategic tool for not only protecting reimbursements, but also increasing market share.²

What can surgery centers do to not only lower costs, but also improve quality, support safety and enhance patient satisfaction scores at the same time? What can you do to ensure you’re the ASC your patients want and need?

“To succeed today, surgery centers need to think creatively. What can you do to improve both patient and physician satisfaction? In my experience, a clinical assessment is a proven place to start.”

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A traditional part of the solution is to rely on manufacturers’ sales representatives to help identify opportunities to improve product selection and lower costs. For surgery centers, sales reps continue to be an invaluable source for cost savings. But given new cost and quality pressures, an important next step is to look beyond traditional thinking and into more holistic opportunities to cut waste, increase efficiency, save money — and ultimately, improve the quality of care.

To achieve both cost and quality goals today, it’s important to combine supply chain and clinical perspectives. A clinical assessment can help you do that by spotting otherwise hidden opportunities to improve inventory management and clinical practices.

To successfully evaluate these opportunities, the key is collaborating with a clinical team of surgery center professionals who have both OR and supply chain expertise. By leveraging this holistic perspective, surgery centers are better prepared to understand, prioritize and pursue opportunities that will improve the health of not only your patients, but also your practice.

What is the value of conducting a clinical assessment?

A clinical assessment addresses the broad gamut of clinical, financial and operational challenges that surgery centers face today. In particular, a clinical assessment can help your surgery center 1) enhance patient satisfaction; 2) uncover real savings opportunities; 3) increase OR efficiency and 4) improve compliance. Here’s a closer look at each.

1. Enhance patient satisfaction
Surgery centers should focus closely on patient satisfaction scores, because they’re an important factor in determining reimbursements. A clinical assessment can help your surgery center meet this challenge by giving you new tools to support patient safety and drive faster throughput.

From a safety perspective, a clinical assessment reviews your clinical practices and identifies any potential opportunities for improvement. Process reviews include assessing patient comfort, on-time starts and the efficiency of case turnover. A review of patient safety best practices also can include the “time outs” that confirm the right procedure is being performed for the right patient.

Another way a clinical assessment can help you improve patient satisfaction is by studying your current patient flow, identifying potential ways to reduce wait time and make patients more comfortable.

2. Uncover real savings opportunities
Many pack programs haven’t been reviewed for years. Taking a fresh look can help identify hidden waste that can save significant dollars and lower the cost of doing business.

In addition to its positive impact on patient satisfaction, a clinical assessment can improve physician satisfaction as well, because they know they’re helping to improve patient outcomes and their personal incomes at the same time.

3. Increase OR efficiency
By becoming more efficient with supply and process management and reducing the number of items opened for each case, your surgery center can help improve OR efficiency and increase turnover. That can help your surgery center stay on schedule and potentially handle more cases in less time. Also, working faster means that physicians can potentially return to their offices or hospitals sooner each day.

Overall, process improvements can help your surgery center run more smoothly — such as streamlining delivery schedules and organizing inventory locations more efficiently.

4. Improve compliance
The Clinical Assessment Team provides guidance that can help surgery centers establish policies and procedures to ensure compliance with such regulatory organizations as JCAHO, AORN and AAAHC.

As part of this process, the Clinical Assessment Team can observe and comment on your surgery center’s compliance with the recommended practices of these organizations, such as: 1) During set-up, are you labeling medications on the sterile field? 2) Are you pausing for a time out? 3) Are you following sterile techniques?

How does a clinical assessment work?

The key is collaboration. To maximize success, the Clinical Assessment Team works closely with your surgery center staff to help assess clinical effectiveness and customize solutions based on your goals.

As a critical component of this process, the Clinical Assessment Team communicates regularly with your surgery center staff — tapping directly into their deep understanding of the practice to uncover hidden waste, discover real savings opportunities and improve OR efficiency.
What does a clinical assessment include?

A clinical assessment is comprised of three major components: 1) identifying process improvements and safety standards; 2) evaluating efficiency of current procedure supply and 3) uncovering new cost savings initiatives. Each plays a critical role in helping your surgery center identify hidden waste and find real savings in the OR. Here's a closer look at each component — and how it delivers value to surgery centers:

1. Identify process improvements and safety standards
Maximize the efficiency of your surgery center’s case pick process. Inefficiency can make inventory management more difficult. For example, a surgery center may believe that picking five cases in advance will improve efficiency. On the contrary, this practice results in having too many products sitting on carts and in totes, waiting to be used. Meanwhile, inventory shelves are depleted and need to be restocked for the inevitable changes in OR schedules, including accommodating add-on cases. A clinical assessment can help identify this waste of both time and money and recommend improvements to mitigate both.

Evaluate safety standards compliance. The Clinical Assessment Team observes and can advise your surgery center’s clinical director on compliance with such safety issues as safe medication labeling; AAMI protection levels for staff; eye protection and complying with JCAHO, AAAHC and CMS standards.

Assess the level of gown protection achieved via current practices. This can be both a safety and a cost savings opportunity. The assessment process can confirm that the surgery center staff is providing the correct amount of protection for each type of procedure performed. Sometimes, more protection is used than needed — and revealing this could save you money. For example, a surgery center may be using an AAMI Level 4 gown for a particular procedure, when a lower-cost Level 3 gown would offer adequate protection.

Assess draping practices for optimal and efficient coverage. For example, a surgery center may be using an extremity drape and then adding extra drapes for adequate coverage. The Clinical Assessment Team may recommend replacing that practice with an extremity drape that has attached arm board covers. This would eliminate the cost of extra draping, while reducing the number of steps in the draping process.

2. Evaluate efficiency of current procedure supply
Validate the right pack for each procedure. This step alone can represent significant cost savings. In an actual case study, one surgery center had not reviewed its pack program for years. During that time, case volume had grown substantially and there were new procedures added to the case mix. The clinical assessment revealed that this surgery center was using its original hand pack as the “basic pack” for most procedures, creating about $30 of waste each time it was opened. Once this waste was revealed, the surgery center had the knowledge to update and align its pack program with the current case mix.

Assess the supply chain’s impact on the practice, patient throughput and overall costs. Aligning inventory levels with actual utilization — and ensuring that the pack program minimizes the need to pull off-the-shelf items — can increase efficiency, lower costs and help improve your surgery center’s bottom line.

Evaluate the level of returns to the case pick area following each procedure. As mentioned earlier, tying up too much inventory in case carts and totes depletes inventory on the shelves. This inefficiency makes it more difficult to cost-effectively have products available to accommodate changes in caseload and scheduling.

Identify supply consolidation opportunities for high-volume, supply-intense procedures. This standardization effort can improve both efficiency and lower costs. At the same time, the Clinical Assessment Team reviews new procedures to determine to what extent they require different bundles of supplies altogether.
3. Uncover new cost savings initiatives

Identify waste in custom pack components. Surgeons can change their preferences over time. The clinical assessment can spot packs that need to be updated due to evolving clinical preference needs. Otherwise, items may remain in the packs and be wasted.

Explore ways to standardize products. Using the same single items both inside and outside of your packs is a prime opportunity to standardize with the lowest cost alternative. As long as the products are clinically acceptable inside the packs, you’ll save money and maintain quality of care at the same time.

Review the cost benefits of incorporating single-sterile items into packs. If a surgery center is pulling a particular single-sterile product from the shelves most of the time, adding it to the pack as part of the standardization effort can save money.

Increase efficiencies and savings by evaluating clinical practices. An example is how towels are layered on the OR back table.

“As one of the largest areas of disposable spend, custom procedure packs are a prime source of hidden waste and real savings.”

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If using a heavy-duty back table cover, no layering is required. But if the OR staff feels more comfortable double layering, use a ¾ drape to save money.

Determine the need for optimizing the surgery center’s pack program. The key is to keep the pack program aligned with changes to case mix and procedure volume. For example:
1) Have you added new procedures, but are using packs not built specifically for them?
2) Have surgeons left, but their preferences are still built inside your packs?
3) Do you really need to keep packs for low-volume procedures?

The no-cost* clinical assessment from Cardinal Health

At Cardinal Health, we assemble a team of perioperative nurses, each with an average of 20+ years of clinical and supply chain experience. This Clinical Assessment Team will visit your surgery center on-site and collaborate directly with your staff. The nondisruptive process includes observing the case pick process, procedure set-up and draping practices.

The Clinical Assessment Team combines these learnings with our knowledge of surgery center best practices from across the country to tailor an efficient, cost savings solution for you. Just as every surgery center’s needs are unique, so is every customized solution. There’s no cost for the assessment.

During your surgery center’s clinical assessment, you’ll learn:
• Where the hidden waste is in your OR — and how you can convert it into real savings
• How efficient your current clinical practices are — and how to improve them to support patient safety, satisfaction and OR efficiency
• How to design a pack program that is the most effective match for your case mix
• Ultimately, how to take back more time for patient care

What value would a no-cost* clinical assessment bring to your surgery center?
To learn more, contact asc@cardinalhealth.com or call 614.757.1698.

References
1 Becker’s ASC Review. “6 Thoughts on Improving ASC Profits.” November 2, 2016.

* The discounts or rebates described above, as well as any other discounts or reductions in price you receive under this Agreement, if any, are each a “discount or other reduction in price” to you under Section 1128B(1)(A) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1320a-7b(1)(A)). Accordingly, you may be required to disclose this and any other discounts or reductions in price you receive under any state or federal program which provides charge based reimbursement for the products and services covered by this Agreement.