

# Drive staff and physician recruitment and retention with revenue cycle outsourcing

By Ken Bulow, executive vice president of operations, Surgical Notes

For ASCs to remain viable and achieve long-term success in this highly competitive environment, they must continuously pursue growth opportunities and improve various aspects of their operations. Two of the foundational pillars for ASC sustainability and growth are staff and physician recruitment and retention.

Yet these are also some of the biggest challenges facing surgery centers nationwide — challenges that must be overcome if an ASC hopes to benefit from the rapidly shifting movement toward outpatient services. Without adequate staff and physicians, a surgery center's ability to grow through adding new procedures and specialties and expanding its physical footprint will prove difficult at best.

To be successful with staff and physician retention and recruitment, ASCs will want to follow some tried-and-true tactics. For staff recruitment and retention, this includes widely publicizing openings, relying on existing staff for personnel and work environment improvement recommendations, and increasing compensation and strengthening benefits. For physician staff recruitment and retention, a combination of leaning on the current physician base, offering desired block times and possibly ownership shares, investing in new clinical technology, and making scheduling cases simple remain effective tactics.

But one strategy not typically associated with staff and physician recruitment and retention that's proving to be very helpful for surgery centers in these areas is outsourcing their revenue cycle management (RCM). Surgery centers generally outsource their RCM to an ASC billing company with hopes that doing so will improve their financial performance. While that is still likely to be the primary motivating factor for RCM outsourcing, ASCs should understand how outsourcing can have a significant, positive impact on staff and physician recruitment and retention.

## Benefits for staffing

With ASCs facing increased competition for staff, often from organizations that can offer higher salaries and better benefits (e.g., hospitals), it's increasingly difficult to attract and keep the staff needed to support operations. Here a few of the most substantial ways outsourcing RCM helps:

- Outsourcing reduces the number of staff who must be recruited and retained. With ongoing access and support from a team of ASC revenue cycle experts, a center can eliminate open in-house business office positions, reliance on part-time and as-needed (i.e., pro re nata) business office staff, and paying for overtime when full-time staff are unavailable or unable to take on more work. If an existing business office staff member leaves the facility or wants to move to reduced hours, the ASC billing company can take over the available work.
- Existing business office staff receive additional support from the ASC billing company which makes them more productive, successful, and satisfied with their work. Staff who were working excessive overtime or juggling multiple roles can move to a more reasonable schedule, helping reduce the potential for burnout that often contributes to staff turnover.
- By reducing in-house business office positions, an ASC's leadership can allocate more time and energy to recruiting and retaining the clinical and operational staff it physically needs at the facility.
- Freed up office space can make working conditions more comfortable for remaining business office staff or be converted to help with clinical and operational performance.
- With the savings from reduced business office salaries and benefits, an ASC is likely to find itself able to offer more competitive salaries and benefits to the staff it needs to recruit and retain.

- The financial improvements that typically come with outsourcing can also support staff recruitment and retention. ASCs can offer higher salaries, better benefits, and bonuses and make investments in new furniture, technology, and other areas that can create a more welcoming, productive, and appealing work environment.

### Benefits for physicians

ASCs also face increasing competition for physicians, from hospitals and other ASCs. Outsourcing RCM helps ASCs with physician recruitment and retention in a number of ways:

- RCM outsourcing typically leads to a meaningful improvement in financial performance. For current and future owners, that tends to translate to increases in distributions, investments in new clinical technology that can help physicians expand their surgical volume and improve outcomes, and higher value of ownership shares.
- If some of that increased revenue goes toward improving an ASC's clinical operations, non-owners currently with or considering bringing surgical cases to the center should find the facility more appealing.
- With outsourcing, the ASC can achieve an additional financial windfall in the form of immediate cost savings that come with scaling back business office staffing and recruitment expenses.
- With a reduced administrative workload, the ASC can focus more on other matters that may directly or indirectly affect its physicians. This includes allocating more time and resources for physician recruitment; researching new technology and services that can strengthen operations; pursuing

improvements in significant areas such as purchasing and inventory management that can further reduce costs; and working with its ASC billing partner to negotiate or renegotiate managed care contracts and grow revenue.

- If an ASC wants to add a new specialty and physicians, outsourcing RCM makes doing so much easier since it eliminates finding revenue cycle staff with knowledge of the specialty's billing intricacies or training existing staff on these requirements.
- Outsourcing RCM tends to make the ASC billing process more efficient and effective. This not only helps with overall performance but also tends to reduce the workload for physicians. The ASC billing company can speak with patients about their payment responsibilities, implement processes that can help reduce the frequency that physicians need to be queried about documentation, and inform the ASC and its physicians when coverage changes impact the financial viability of a procedure.

### Outsourcing RCM can be a recruitment and retention difference-maker

While ASCs considering outsourcing RCM aren't typically thinking about doing so for staff and physician recruitment and retention, it's clear that outsourcing can be a highly effective way to better navigate these significant challenges. With no indication that competition for personnel will slow down any time soon, ASCs must be leveraging all the tools at their disposal to improve recruitment and retention efforts. By outsourcing RCM, surgery centers gain a service and a billing partner that can help them add and keep the people and achieve the financial performance they need to be successful for the short and long term.

## How RCM outsourcing helped a Virginia ASC navigate staffing challenges

When Princess Anne Ambulatory Surgery Center's full-time billing and patient account representative requested to have her hours reduced and move into a part-time position, Charmayne Harrington knew it was time for a change. The ASC's business office manager who has been with the Virginia Beach, Va., surgery center since it opened in 2007, Harrington recognized there was no one on her current staff who could effectively move into this role. In addition, the ASC was already in need of greater staff support. It was lacking in some accounts receivable (AR) follow-up and not managing this as effectively as Harrington knew the ASC should.

These challenges caused Harrington significant stress and made it more difficult to keep up with daily responsibilities. Further complicating matters, Princess Anne Ambulatory Surgery Center could not expand its footprint to support all the business office staff Harrington believed would be necessary to meet its revenue cycle management needs. There was also uncertainty about whether the ASC could even recruit the personnel it would need considering the current staffing shortage and increased competition for talent.

But Harrington didn't panic. She knew there was a way her ASC could effectively and efficiently address its looming staffing challenge as well as the other barriers to revenue cycle success: outsourcing the center's RCM.

After doing its due diligence, Princess Anne Ambulatory Surgery Center chose an RCM billing partner and began the outsourcing transition. Harrington and the ASC's new partner worked closely together to align processes and workflows while addressing any small issues that came up along the way. During the transition process, the billing partner took on responsibilities to alleviate Harrington's workload and bring about significant improvements, such as proper loading, setting up, and interpretation of the ASC's managed care contracts.

Working with its RCM partner, Princess Anne Ambulatory Surgery Center achieved measurable improvements in many revenue cycle metrics, including:

- Increase in payments
- Increase in payments > 90 days
- Decrease in bad debt
- Decrease in AR

Thanks to outsourcing, Harrington also saw her personal productivity improve. Without the need to spend significant time overseeing employees in the office, she's gained back valuable time that has allowed her to work on other projects and duties that had been pushed to the back burner. "With a team taking care of our RCM, I no longer worry whether I will find myself short staffed," she says. "With a talented and educated team overseeing our billing and collections, I don't have to worry about these anymore either. The outsourcing experience and our RCM partner have definitely exceeded my expectations."