

ASC FOCUS

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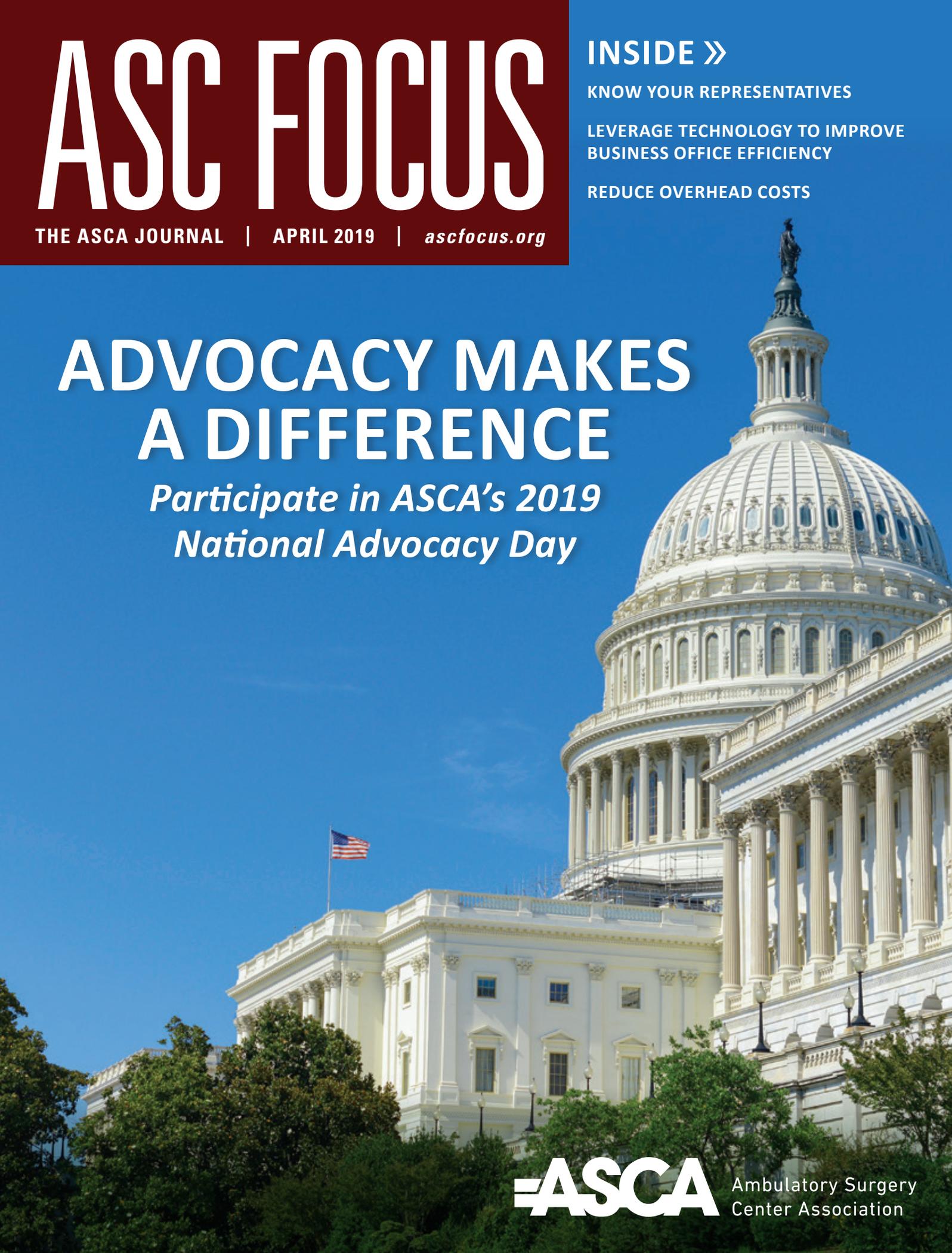
KNOW YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE
BUSINESS OFFICE EFFICIENCY

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ASCA Ambulatory Surgery
Center Association

Leverage Technology to Improve Business Office Efficiency

Tips on training and implementation **BY RANDY BISHOP**



If you have worked in the ASC industry long enough, you have likely heard a phrase along the lines of “case volume is the lifeblood of an ASC.” While cases are vital to an ASC’s success—after all, without cases, there are no billable services—cases on their own will not make or break a surgery center. What will have a profound impact is the performance of an ASC’s business office.

Just how important is the business office? Consider that a poorly performing business office, when you factor in issues such as denied claims, unsuccessful patient collections and the time and resources allocated to appeals and collections follow-up, can turn a profitable procedure into one that can lose an ASC money.

If such a scenario is commonplace, performing more procedures—*i.e.*, growing case volume—will not appropriately contribute to the success of an ASC. On the other hand, a well-run business office capable of achieving timely, accurate billing and collections will help an ASC achieve its financial and growth goals.

Solutions That Deliver Results

The good news for ASCs is that the importance of business office performance has not gone unnoticed. In recent years, numerous companies have launched technologies aimed at improving ASC business office efficiency and performance. Such technologies are either intended to help make it easier for business office staff members to complete their responsibilities or dramatically reduce—if not eliminate—a responsibility altogether.

Consider these business office-related technologies.



Online patient registration—

People have become accustomed to performing numerous tasks online. Now patients can easily complete their ASC registration online as well. With this service, patients provide their personal information, insurance information and health history via computer or smartphone. This technology helps reduce the need for business office staff to complete numerous phone or in-person interviews and can improve accuracy of patient information required for billing.

Eligibility verification—Few developments can more significantly derail efficient collections than inaccurate patient insurance information. Patients might provide an outdated insurance card or their plan might change between when their procedure was scheduled and the surgery date. Insurance information errors can lead to claims denials, incorrect amounts collected from patients and other billing headaches. Eligibility verification technology allows business office staff to quickly verify insurance information and determine whether a procedure is covered. It also can help determine a patient’s financial responsibility.

Mobile transcription app—A significant challenge ASCs can face is getting their physicians to dictate and finalize operative reports in a timely manner. Delays in completing the operative report increase the time for claims submission and grow an ASC’s accounts receivable (A/R). A mobile transcription app can encourage physicians to finish their portion of the medical record faster. While functionality between such apps can differ, they generally provide physicians with the ability to select a case and then dictate its operative report into their smart device’s microphone. The app sends the dictation for transcription. When transcription is completed, the physician can review, revise and sign the operative report.

Document management—One of the most time-consuming responsibilities for business office staff in an ASC using paper records is completion and retrieval of patient charts. Document management software, which essentially turns paper records into digital charts, helps streamline these processes by eliminating manual chart preparation and searching. Such software also can flag missing forms required for completed charts. Business office staff spend less time assembling, reviewing and finding charts and more time completing tasks that require more manual processes. This technology also frees up critical office space used for paper chart storage and reduces or eliminates costs associated with offsite chart storage and retrieval fees.

Data analytics—The greater insight an ASC has into its business office, the better it can improve performance. This is where data analytics software come in. ASCs that use business intelligence analytics can dive

into their revenue cycle data in areas such as claims submission timeliness and success, payer and physician trends, staff productivity and other key performance metrics. ASCs can then use this data for benchmarking, identifying poor performing areas and staff, measuring success of improvement measures and setting goals for staff.

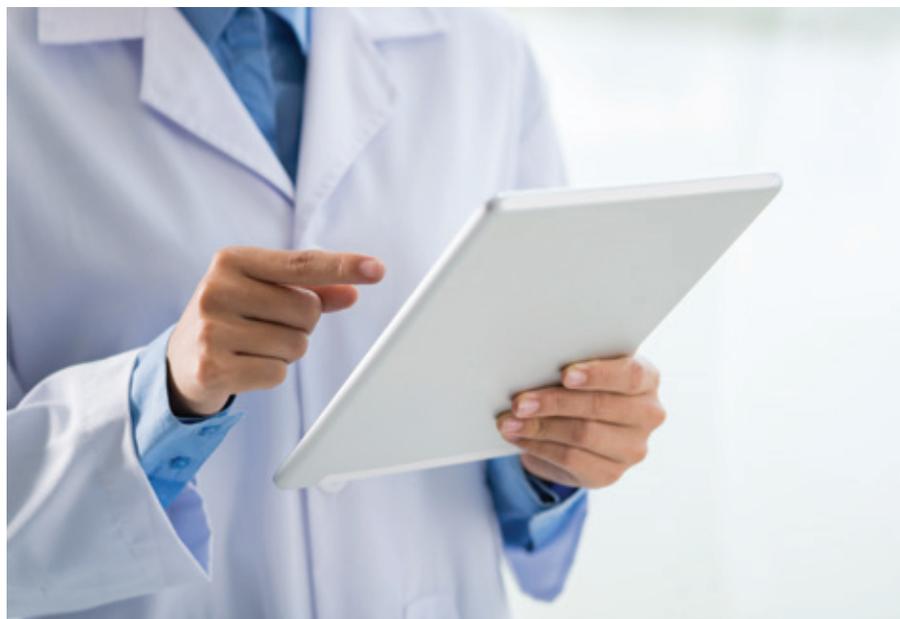
Patient cost estimator—With patients being asked to shoulder more of the financial burden for their care, ASCs must develop effective ways to collect payments from patients. Patient cost estimation technology can help surgery centers more effectively calculate what patients are likely to owe by entering patient, procedure and insurance information. Business office staff can then collect this amount on the day of surgery or work with patients to arrange another means of covering expenses. Such a solution can help reduce the risk of patient collections failures or the need for staff to spend significant time chasing after patients for payment.

Maximizing Benefits

Adding any of these technologies can greatly improve one or more aspects of your business office's performance. Turning "can greatly improve" into "will greatly improve" requires more than just investing in the solution, however.

For technology used by staff and physicians, seek out solutions that will have minimal disruption to their daily workflow and work to secure their buy-in before implementation. Introducing new technology requires making changes, so prepare staff and physicians by providing education on the new technology prior to its implementation. If possible, give staff hands-on time with the technology so they can become comfortable with its look and feel. Ask vendor representatives to visit your ASC and answer staff questions.

Try to ensure all business office staff gain at least a baseline under-



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—Randy Bishop, *Surgical Notes*

standing of new technology before you go live. Identify super-users—individuals who are comfortable with the technology—and task them with helping colleagues learn how to use the solution more effectively. Incentivize staff for embracing and learning how to effectively use a new technology to help further secure buy-in.

Once your ASC is comfortably using a new technology, explore more advanced features, if available. Leveraging additional features that can drive further efficiencies should be easier than getting started with a technology since staff is already familiar with basic operations and controls.

An important caveat: Adding a new technology can introduce new business office inefficiencies. During the initial weeks after going live with a technology, monitor staff/patient usage closely to ensure it is used correctly and consistently. When rolling out new

features, repeat this process. Look for user shortcomings and implement corrective action. Continually measure how the technology is affecting your business office's efficiency. Set goals to further improve performance, particularly when introducing new or more advanced features.

Technology has the potential to transform an ASC's business office and greatly improve the profitability of an ASC. Perform your due diligence and learn about the many solutions now available and the impact they will have on your performance and bottom line. You might be surprised to learn just how easy it is to achieve business office efficiencies you might have never thought possible. «

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