

## Op-ed on Savings, Benefits of ASCs

### Ambulatory Surgery Centers Provide Financial Relief During Challenging Economy

By Scott Leggett

As every sector of our economy is looking for ways to reduce spending, governments, businesses and families all have had to tighten their belts and re-order their priorities. Given this challenging economic environment, the skyrocketing costs of health care—to the government and individuals alike—have hardly escaped notice. Still, when it comes to health care spending, many policy makers are overlooking a notable source of savings: ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs).

ASCs are health care facilities that provide same-day surgical care, patient-focused service and a cost-effective alternative to other surgical care providers. Current industry estimates indicate that ASCs currently save Medicare about \$2.5 billion annually. In addition to the sizeable savings they already offer, ASCs could save Medicare an additional \$2 billion each year if just half of all eligible outpatient surgeries provided in hospital outpatient departments today were shifted to the ASC setting. This is because, on average, Medicare pays ASCs just 56% of the amount it pays hospital outpatient facilities to perform the same procedures. Those savings are then passed on to patients and insurers, including Medicare and Medicaid, in the form of lower health care spending and copayments.

As past President of the California Ambulatory Surgery Association ('96-'97) and CEO of *Surgery One* located in San Diego, CA, I have observed, "Patients need to be more vigilant when it comes to making decisions about where they choose to have their surgical procedures performed in order to keep their costs down. Many surgical procedures that do not require multiple day hospital stays can be conducted



Adam Fierer, MD, patient Cecilia Piementel, and Rick Viela, PA, after Cecilia's hernia surgery at *Surgery One*  
Photo: Maura Leonard

at an ASC for greatly reduced costs. The number one reason for hospitalization after a surgical procedure is pain control---with technological advancements in surgical equipment, many procedures these days are less invasive than there were in the past, therefore reducing the need for advanced pain management." Advanced procedures that can be safely performed in the ASC setting include: total joint replacement, back and neck surgery, weight loss surgery, cardiology procedures, thyroidectomies, neurostimulator implants, and hysterectomies. Along with advanced procedures, ASCs have performed the full gamut of orthopedic sports medicine procedures, ophthalmology, gastroenterology (GI), ENT, urology, pain management and general surgery for decades.

"Furthermore, recovery times are quicker and many surgeries can be performed as outpatient procedures. Patients need to ask questions about how much a procedure will cost in the hospital and how long it will take compared to the same procedure being performed at an ASC. Traditional inpatient procedures are now moving more frequently into outpatient procedures saving both time and money. In our *Surgery One* ASC's we call this the 'Outpatient Experience', which benefits both the consumer as well as government programs, while curtailing rising insurance costs."

What matters most to patients and their family members, however, is the high quality of care that ASCs provide. ASCs provide this top-quality care and a patient-focused experience at an economical price in an atmosphere removed from the distractions associated with running a full-service acute care facility. These benefits have helped the industry achieve a 92 percent satisfaction rate among patients.

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ASCs are also essential Medicare providers of a number of critical preventive services such as colonoscopies. In fact, ASCs across the country now perform more than 40 percent of all Medicare colonoscopies, which has helped contribute to a decade-long decrease in colorectal cancer mortality. The preventive services that ASCs provide routinely lead to early detection and treatment that offers an improved quality of life to patients and important cost savings to insurers, Medicare, patients and the taxpayers who fund the system. ASCs have the capacity to provide more of these life-saving procedures.

ASC's are an outstanding example of a health care provider that has achieved cost savings without compromising on quality care. They are significant providers of surgical care today and a key part of the answer to the difficult questions of cost and quality that state and federal policy makers are grappling with as they design our health care system for the future. All health care providers should seek to achieve the kind of quality standards and cost savings that ASCs have achieved. In the meantime, policy makers should be doing all they can to ensure that patients have access to the many benefits that ASCs provide and to enact public policy that supports ASCs.

Surgery One is an industry leader in San Diego County with a network of outpatient surgical centers. The surgery centers offer a wide variety of surgical service lines ranging from orthopedic sports medicine, spine, pain management, ENT, general surgery, gastroenterology, urology, cardiology and ophthalmology. Call 1-800-451-2032 or visit [www.surgeryone.com](http://www.surgeryone.com) for additional information.

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*Note to Editor:* Please publish with attached photo and caption if space allows, "Adam Fierer, MD, patient Cecilia Piementel, and Rick Viela, PA, after Cecilia's hernia surgery at *Surgery One*".

*Photo:* Maura Leonard.

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