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BUSINESS SOLUTIONS FOR THE ASC

## A Vital Cog in Your ASC Machine

### Four Tips to Maximize Your Surgery Center's Business Office Operations

By Carolyn Whitsel

There are numerous components that combine to help your surgery center run as efficiently and effectively as possible. Choosing the right staff, ensuring you have the right mix of cases and specialties, and balancing your equipment and supply costs are just a few things that can impact your center's ability to operate optimally. Another critical component that will determine the success of your center is the management of your business office operations. This seemingly simple item, while often under emphasized, has a profound impact on a center's financial returns.

I've helped with business office operations in surgery centers for more than 20 years. While there are many aspects to an effective and efficiently run business office, below are four tips to improve your ASC's business office operations that I've learned over the years.


#### **Make Sure Your Center Has a Strong Business Office Manager (BOM)**

Finding a good business office manager (BOM) is the first, and often most important, step towards ensuring that your business office operations are well managed. A good manager doesn't necessarily have every answer, but he or she knows how to find answers and solve problems as they arise. Likewise, a good manager may not be able to complete tasks as quickly as those who perform them on a daily basis, but

he or she knows how to assist others when necessary and understands when to pitch in. Lastly, a good manager understands how to relate to their staff, develop effective teams, maintain office organization and use resources.

Here are a few key questions to ask when looking for a good business office manager:

- Does your BOM make sure that each employee has the training and tools needed to fulfill their role? Does your BOM help



employees feel valued and make sure expectations are clearly outlined?

- Does your BOM ensure that all employees are cross-trained in all functions within the business office? An effective business office requires a team approach where everyone looks out for one another, in addition to themselves.
- When a problem is presented, is the BOM open to suggestions for process changes and improvements from the staff? Employees need to feel they're a part of the solution and not just a presenter of issues.
- Does your BOM mentor the staff to go above and beyond simply getting the job done? Effective employees are constantly growing in their roles and responsibilities.
- Does your BOM know how to manage without micromanaging? Reports and patient accounting systems are wonderful resources for the business office manager in managing the staff and accounts receivable.
- Is your BOM available to the staff, and are they involved with office processes?

### Take an Organized Approach

Many centers have different views on what the BOM should and should not do. And what works for one center may not work for another. One approach I've found to be effective is for the BOM to stop by each desk in the morning and check on how the day looks for staff in the office. This check includes a discussion on what each person is working on, what they have planned for the day and what they need help with. The same check-up functions should be performed at the end of the day to help staff mentally wrap up what they're working on and prepare for the next day's tasks.

Another approach to organization that I've found helpful is for each desk to have precisely labeled folders and stack trays with titles such as "work to be completed" or "waiting on reply." This is a highly effective way for staff to stay organized and focused on work that needs to be finished immediately or completed by the next day; it also helps others in the office stay up-to-speed on what's being worked on in case anyone needs to step in while someone's out of the office.

An organized and open sharing system makes it clear what everyone in the office is working on and what needs to be accomplished at any given time. This helps the business office's operations run smoothly and avoid build up.

### Understand All Aspects of Your Business Office

Your BOM and staff should understand all aspects of what's going on in the center's business office. That's why I recommend that all employees be cross-trained. This can be accomplished by rotating roles and taking advantage of employees who are out of the office by sitting and working at their desks. Cross-training in this way does two things: First, it shows the staff that the BOM is willing to roll up their sleeves and pitch in to help with day-to-day activities. It also helps keep work flowing smoothly, so no one desk becomes overly daunting to return to after a week or more away. Second, working an employee's desk helps the staff and BOM learn about processes that need to be updated or changed. It also helps the staff learn all the roles within the business office.

Teamwork and cross-training are important; however, I want to be clear that the BOM doesn't need to work an employee's desk everyday. Just being part of the backup team shows a commitment on the BOM's part to making the office and center as efficient as possible, and allows for weaknesses or issues to be quickly identified and resolved.

### Don't Forget the Data

Every good business office needs data to understand where the center is currently operating, where it should be operating going forward and what it needs to do to get there. Reports, data tracking and key indicators tell a huge story. They're a great way to manage an office and center without micromanaging staff or physicians. Payor mix trending, rate per case (broken down by specialty and CPT code), A/R days, collections as a percent of billings, aging greater than 60 or 120 days and daily cash receipts are just a few of the reports I monitor on a regular basis to ensure the center's business office operations are tracking correctly.

I also like to look at the aging report, pick a percentage of accounts, and read the collection notes for thoroughness. I might also pull a schedule and check a percentage of cases for the next few days and look to make sure insurance verification is being performed.

This article outlined four aspects to consider when approaching the management of your center's business office. While running an effective business office is a complex and ever-changing task, following the tips above will help you ask the questions and identify the key issues to keep your center's business office operations moving down the right path. □



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