

Scheduling of Procedures and Staff in an Ambulatory Surgery Center

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KEYWORDS

- Operating room utilization • Surgical procedure scheduling
- Operating room allocation • Ambulatory surgical center • ASC • ASC management

KEY POINTS

- For ambulatory surgical centers (ASC) to succeed financially, it is critical for ASC managers to schedule surgical procedures in a manner that optimizes operating room (OR) efficiency.
- OR efficiency is maximized by using historical data to accurately predict future OR workload, thereby enabling OR time to be properly allocated to surgeons.
- Strategies to maintain a well-functioning ASC include recruiting and retaining the right staff and ensuring that patients and surgeons are satisfied with their experience.
- Understanding OR management terminology is essential to effective ASC management.
- OR scheduling is done according to 3 different systems: Fixed Hours, Reasonable Time, and Any Workday.
- OR delays can be categorized in order to pinpoint the relative contribution of a particular delay to a room's finish time.

INTRODUCTION

This article provides practitioners and residents with the current best practices for scheduling procedures and staff in ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs). Many anesthesiologists have leadership roles in ASCs because their participation in all perioperative periods provides the opportunity to develop a strong understanding of operating room

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(OR) workflow. In addition, anesthesiologists are well placed to build relationships with nursing and other staff at all points of care. Furthermore, there are clinical, operational, and economic alignments between ASC management and anesthesiologists and anesthesiologists eventually work with all of an ASC's surgeons.

If veteran ASC medical directors were asked to give advice to a newly appointed ASC manager, several main points might be emphasized (**Box 1**) and objective criteria for measuring success may be suggested (**Box 2**). Although this article focuses on systematic approaches to scheduling, running an ASC is largely about personnel management. The top priority is to keep all customers, including the staff, patient, and surgeon, satisfied.¹

BASIC DEFINITIONS

Basic definitions are required to properly execute a practical approach to ASC scheduling, allowing effective communication between team members (**Fig. 1, Table 1**).²

SYSTEMS FOR PROCEDURE SCHEDULING

One of the most important jobs in an ASC is scheduling procedures in the OR, which is the facility's scarcest and most expensive resource. The OR procedure scheduling function is usually overseen by 1 person such as the ASC director, or by a group of people that might include a triad of anesthesiologist, surgeon, and nurse. This entity examines OR times for each surgeon or group to predict future OR workload and compute the optimal allocated OR time to maximize OR efficiency. The goal is to maximize the number of surgical procedures that can be performed in each OR in the regularly defined workday while minimizing expenses. Because wages, salaries, and

Box 1

Strategies to maintain a well-functioning ASC

- Recruit and retain the right people

Staff often choose to work at an ASC rather than a hospital for specific benefits (eg, more predictable hours, no call, less bureaucracy, faster decision making, no emergencies to disrupt the day, cordial team environment.) Therefore, keeping staff happy is a top priority. They are the most important resource. Move to remove the wrong people.

- Ensure that patients are satisfied with their experiences.

Start procedures on time by ensuring appropriate preoperative consultation and laboratory work have been done, scheduling appropriately to avoid delays or cancellations, and minimizing postoperative pain, nausea, and vomiting.

- Manage the ASC to have happy surgeons

Surgeons may have options to operate elsewhere. Starting on time, quick turnovers, knowledgeable staff, appropriate equipment and instruments, and providing easy access to OR time are surgeon satisfiers.

- Continuously work on the minor details to improve processes

- Make the case documentation and billing as clean as possible and have them work together

- Have the correct governance structure with properly defined responsibilities, authority, and policies and procedures.

Courtesy of Dr. Nanji M, President and CEO, Surgical Centers Incorporated, Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Personal interview. June 14, 2013.

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