

GRASSROOTS ALERT:

PROTECTING YOUR ASC

Ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs) and other short-stay surgical providers continue to come under attack by competitors who want to limit choice and access to quality care for consumers through legislation. Many states are considering bills that would add new regulations, red tape and even taxes. Now more than ever, we need every center to get involved and help shape legislation that impacts our business.

One of the easiest ways to affect change is to join forces with your state's ASC association. According to Peter Lohrengel, executive director of the Florida Society of Ambulatory Surgery Centers, a coalition of organizations with common interests carries more weight with lawmakers than an individual center.

"Legislators want to know where the industry stands on certain issues. They look to organizations like ours to provide them with that information in a coordinated fashion, and they listen when we speak."

Lohrengel also says state advocacy groups can help ASCs understand and track issues as they move through the legislative process.

"We push information out to the members so it's easy for them to

stay on top of what's important. We also coordinate our efforts for maximum effect, so we tell them what we need from them and when we need it. It really takes the guesswork out of it for the ASCs."

"Legislators listen to people they know, so it's important for administrators and physicians to be engaged

in the process. The more involved we are, the more credibility we have on important issues."

This philosophy was put to the test in Texas recently when several bills that would have banned physician ownership were introduced in committee. Working with the Texas Ambulatory Surgery Center Society, Symbion and several other groups reached out to state legislators to educate them about the effect of such legislation. The bills have since stalled in committee.

"We can't afford to get complacent," said Regional Vice President Tony German, who helped coordinate Symbion's efforts against the bills. "It's up to each center to get involved and stay involved. Our quick reaction to negative changes can make a difference."

GET INVOLVED!

- Join your state's ASC organization
- Take a leadership role in the organization
- Educate physicians about the issues and encourage their involvement
- Educate elected officials and community leaders about the benefits of ASCs
- Get involved politically for positive representation
- Speak out and be a leader!

FOCUSON: QUALITY

(Continued from front)

administrator of Village SurgiCenter in Erie, Pa. "We also use the post-op phone call to reiterate that we want their comments—good or bad."

Bloxdorf's approach has paid off. His center ranked first in the company last year with a return rate of 52 percent. In addition to posting all comments—good and bad—in the center's lounge area, he's made improvements based on feedback from the surveys.

"We noticed that patients felt forgotten once they reached the pre-op area and had to wait – even if they were only left alone for a few minutes," recalls Bloxdorf. "So we set up a system to monitor the area and provide periodic updates if a delay is necessary."

"Sometimes it's the small things that make a big difference," agrees Todd Davis, interim administrator of NorthStar Surgical Center in Lubbock, Texas. "What might seem insignificant to us may be very important to the patient. Being aware of what matters can help us provide a more positive experience."

IMHOFF APPOINTED



John E. Imhoff, M.D.
Premier Surgery Center
Brunswick, GA

John E. Imhoff, M.D. of Premier Surgery Center in Brunswick, Ga., has been appointed to the scientific advisory board of the Hawaiian Eye Foundation, a non-profit organization that promotes eye care for the people of the Pacific Basin through service, education and research.

The Foundation partners with eye care professionals from all over the world to provide money, medical supplies, equipment and training to underserved communities. A practicing ophthalmologist since 1983, Dr. Imhoff joins eight nationally and internationally renowned ophthalmologists on the board.

Is there a topic you'd like to see covered in an upcoming edition of *Symbion Connection*? Do you know of a co-worker or physician with an interesting story? Please send your ideas to dstlouis@symbion.com.

SYMBION Connection

THE PUBLICATION FOR SYMBION HEALTHCARE EMPLOYEES

SYMBION
HEALTHCARE

SUMMER 2005

CEO'S CORNER:

DEAR COLLEAGUES:



Richard E. Francis, Jr.
Chairman &
Chief Executive Officer

Our profession is unique in that we have the ability to make a real difference in people's lives. With your help, we're doing that every day, providing quality care to patients and acting with compassion and concern. One of the things I am most proud of is our commitment to continually enhance the services we deliver to patients.

In this issue, you'll read about some of the ways in which we are striving for excellence. Whether pursuing accreditation for our centers or monitoring physician and patient satisfaction, we are committed to finding new ways to elevate the overall experience for those we serve.

Along with our success, comes increased scrutiny. Competitors of ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs) and other short-stay surgical facilities continue to try to limit our ability to provide quality services through

legislation limiting consumer choice. It's up to each of us to get involved and educate our legislators and community leaders about the benefits of ASCs. This issue's Grassroots Alert provides information on how you can help.

Finally, I hope you enjoy reading the personal stories of Dr. Anthony Sudekum of Midwest Special Surgery and Patti Brown, R.N. of Cool Springs Surgery Center who recently traveled to the other side of the world to provide care to victims of December's tsunami disaster. Their efforts exemplify the desire that I believe we all share: to make a difference in the lives of others.

Enjoy this issue and keep up the great work.

Sincerely,

Richard E. Francis, Jr.
Chairman & Chief Executive Officer

FOCUSON: QUALITY

ASKING. LISTENING. RESPONDING: SYMBION TAKES SATISFACTION SERIOUSLY

Symbion measures success in a number of ways, but the satisfaction of our patients is the gold standard.

That's why the company asks patients to provide feedback in areas ranging from quality of care to ease of registration and the amount of time spent waiting for surgery. Last year, 22 percent of patients treated at Symbion's facilities returned a questionnaire compared to the industry average of only 5 percent. A similar system is in place to measure physician feedback on an annual basis.

"We strongly believe in using patient and physician feedback to enhance the overall experience at each of our centers," says Linda McSmith, assistant vice president of regulatory compliance. "In order to understand what's working and what could be improved, we need to encourage every patient and physician to complete and return their surveys."

Upon discharge, patients receive a one-page questionnaire with a postage-paid return envelope.

Completed surveys are mailed to Symbion's corporate office for review before being sent to a third-party vendor for scanning. Administrators are notified immediately of any comments that require personal attention.

Each center receives a monthly electronic report, tracking its progress year-to-date and company-wide. The reports include a summary of all patient comments, allowing administrators to follow up personally if necessary.

"We let patients know we read every survey so they understand how seriously we take their feedback," says Valerie Brickey, administrator of Worcester Surgical Center in Worcester, Ma. "We also focus on involving them in their care every step of the way, explaining what's going to happen and checking back if something changes."

Repetition also can be key when it comes to boosting survey response.

"We touch on the survey three times: in registration, in recovery, and at discharge," says Rick Bloxdorf, (Continued on back)

TOP PERFORMERS

Congratulations to the centers with the highest rate of return for patient satisfaction surveys:

1. Village SurgiCenter of Erie	52%
2. West Bay Surgery Center	51%
3. NorthStar Surgical Center	40%
4. Worcester Surgical Center	36%

EXCELLENCE THROUGH ACCREDITATION

Consumers are beginning to understand what healthcare professionals have known all along: accreditation matters in the quest for quality.

Accreditation is a voluntary process during which healthcare organizations undergo a series of rigorous evaluations in areas ranging from patient safety, infection control and emergency preparedness. Conducted by one of three accrediting bodies, these surveys require ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs) to demonstrate compliance with a number of specific quality standards.

"The accreditation process helps us put in place protocols and systems that make our centers safer and more efficient," says Donna St. Louis, senior vice president of the multi-specialty group. "Patients may not know what accreditation means, but they do notice how quickly they are registered and the cleanliness of the facility."

Although ASCs are not required to seek accreditation from peer-groups such as the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) or the Accreditation Association of Ambulatory Health Care, Inc. (AAAHC), Symbion and its centers are actively pursuing it.

According to JCAHO, there are 300,000 ambulatory health care organizations eligible for accreditation, however only 1,000 have pursued it. Currently, 81 percent of Symbion's centers are accredited by either JCAHO or AAAHC with the remainder working to earn the designation.

"With so few surgery centers earning accreditation, we see it as a point of distinction. It makes a strong statement about our commitment to quality and our willingness to go above and beyond what is required," says Linda McSmith, assistant vice president for regulatory compliance.

In addition to ensuring that quality measures are in place, accreditation is a valuable marketing tool with physicians and managed care organizations who often feel more comfortable sending patients to a facility that has earned validation from an independent third-party organization.

"We're stronger because of the standardizations we follow as an accredited center," says Rick Bloxdorf, administrator of Village SurgiCenter in Erie, Pa. "The policies we've put in place to increase efficiency and decrease infection and complications ultimately help us give patients a better experience, and that shows in their satisfaction ratings."

TIPS FOR A SMOOTHER SURVEY:

Pay special attention to these areas in preparation for your next JCAHO or AAAHC survey:

CREDENTIALING

- Don't allow physician appointments to lapse.
- Complete peer review process on all physicians in the two-year reappointment process; include a quality report outlining any issues that should be considered at reappointment.
- Review and validate all information before taking the provider to the Medical Advisory and Governing Body for consideration.
- Show documentation you have communicated the provider's approved status to the scheduler and clinical staff.

WAIVE TESTING

- Make sure you have a commercial or hospital grade accucheck.
- Complete quality checks per your facility's policy.
- Test your accucheck with two levels of control.
- Keep records of employee competency on accucheck and provide annual training.
- Complete control testing of pregnancy tests per manufacturer's recommendation.

SYMBIONSPOTLIGHT:

MEDICAL MISSIONS BRING HOPE TO THE TSUNAMI ZONE

It happened without warning. Giant waves created by a massive earthquake off the coast of Indonesia consumed entire villages and wreaked devastation.

In the months that followed December's tsunami disaster, Anthony Sudekum, M.D., a hand and plastic surgeon with Midwest Special Surgery in St. Louis, Mo. and Patti Brown, R.N. of Cool Springs Surgery Center in Nashville embarked on missions to provide medical aid to victims of this disaster. Here are their stories.

A CHANGE OF PLANS

When Dr. Sudekum and a group of medical professionals associated with SurfAid International, a non-profit medical assistance group devoted to providing healthcare to the people of the Mentawai Islands, began making plans to travel to the region last year they had no idea they would be assisting victims of two natural disasters.

Heavily damaged by December's tsunami, the Islands, located off the northwest coast of Sumatra, were near the epicenter of a devastating earthquake on March 28, a day before the SurfAid delegation arrived. The 8.7 magnitude quake killed 3,000 people, injured thousands more and sent many fleeing in fear of another tsunami.

"Even before the tsunami, the people of the Mentawai Islands were facing a healthcare crisis. Fifty percent of children die before the age of five because of preventable diseases like



Patti pumps fresh water from the well



Dr. Sudekum performs minor surgery at a makeshift hospital



SurfAid members unload medical supplies

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW YOU CAN HELP VISIT:
www.surfaidinternational.org and www.redcross.org

malaria and tuberculosis," says Dr. Sudekum. "The natural disasters only made these problems worse."

Originally scheduled to provide primary care and perform elective surgeries at a hospital in nearby Padang, the group was redirected to help those injured by the quake. They traveled by boat to the island of Nias where they joined a mobile medical unit set up in an abandoned Buddhist temple. For two days, Dr. Sudekum treated patients with lacerations, head



Anthony Sudekum, M.D.
Midwest Special Surgery
St. Louis, Mo.



Patti Brown, R.N.
Cool Springs Surgery Center
Nashville, Tenn.

wounds and other injuries, all the while coping with strong aftershocks from the quake.

During the 12-day trip, the group also traveled to outlying islands. There they found dry wells, little food and primitive conditions—including "medicine men" who used herbal medicines to treat the sick and injured.

"We gave them medical supplies such as suture kits and local anesthetic, and taught them some basic techniques."

"This is such a primitive region of the world, yet so beautiful and welcoming. At times it felt overwhelming, but we were very fortunate to have the opportunity to help at such a critical time."

ANSWERING THE CALL

For Patti Brown, the decision to travel to Sri Lanka was the result of divine inspiration...in the form of a notice in her church bulletin.

After seeing a request for trained medical professionals, she contacted her pastor who put her in touch with the church's International Mission Board. Two months later, Brown was on a plane, making the 33-hour journey with 10 others.

"Even three months after the disaster, the area looked like it had just been hit by a tornado," recalls Brown.

Coordinating their efforts through the region's minister of health, the group set up a series of day clinics in various locations around three primitive villages. They treated patients of all ages for a variety of upper respiratory diseases and other public health problems.

"Many people had stress-related conditions like ulcers or joint pain brought on by the worry and hardship caused by the disaster. The hospital was only 50 miles away, but getting there could take up to four hours because of the rudimentary transportation. In some cases, we were the only medical resource these people had."

"There is still so much devastation. When you see all that these people have endured, you're overcome with a desire to help," she says. "They are wonderful people, so warm and appreciative."