INTRODUCTION
Today’s transparency of hospital and physician performance is driving aggressive administrative management of healthcare outcomes. Consumers can easily access volumes of what was previously considered discreet information via public websites. Procedure volume, patient satisfaction ratings, and numeric scores related to complication rates can fuel consumer decisions for physician and healthcare facility preference. Professional reputation, often previously proliferated by word of mouth, can now be validated as positive or negative via concrete data sources, chat rooms, and social media websites.

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Most importantly, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has been withholding an increasing percentage of healthcare reimbursement, based on these same variables, combined with measures of efficiency. Additional penalties imposed by CMS related to new bundled payments compound the dollars withheld, creating an environment of strategic urgency to survive the economic cyclone. Healthcare providers and facilities are being forced to examine and re-evaluate existing practices in order to maintain essential services. Changes to current analgesic practices may be the single-most impactful strategy to impose control over this tumultuous environment.

PUBLIC INFORMATION
Common websites that potential customers may access include:

- **Consumer Reports** - includes rating 0-100 on hospital safety, patient experience, patient outcomes, readmission rates.
- **Hospital Compare Government Website** - includes value-based purchasing scores and penalties, patient experience, patient outcomes, readmission rates
- **U.S. News and Health Reports** - includes death rates, patient safety, and hospital reputation
- **Healthgrades** - includes physician and hospital safety ratings 0-5, includes consumer ratings

While these websites provide easily accessible information, some in the industry have raised questions about whether hospitals’ reputations mirror the quality of care provided.1 Interestingly enough, a study conducted at Massachusetts General Hospital found correlations between superior Facebook ratings for hospitals and Hospital Compare data from CMS – the research found that hospitals with lower rates of 30-day unplanned readmissions have higher ratings on Facebook than hospitals with higher readmission rates.2 Regardless of accuracy or reliability of the website data, consumers are regularly accessing these sites to make healthcare choices.

PERFORMANCE IMPACT
Value-based purchasing (VBP) has had a major financial impact on participating hospitals across the country. In 2016, 1,235 hospitals received penalties as a result of deficiencies in the defined categories: clinical process of care, patient experience of care, outcomes, and efficiency.3 CMS penalties now reflect 2% withheld for VBP.4
In 2016, mandatory bundled payments were initiated for joint replacements – and efficiency and spend were retrospectively analyzed to determine if costs were reasonable in comparison to like facilities. According to CMS, the model holds participating hospitals financially accountable for the quality and cost in an episode of care, compounding the economic burden of cost reduction in hospitals. Once again, this data is publicly available, affording consumer scrutiny for best value for healthcare services.

So how do analgesic practices positively impact the categories of VBP, readmission rates, and bundled payments? One of the most obvious categories is patient experience. A 2014 analysis of 2,395 U.S. hospitals revealed that patient pain perception improved by 3.07% between 2008 and 2012. According to the Practice Guidelines for Acute Pain Management in the Perioperative Setting (ASA), anesthesiologists should employ multimodal therapy when possible. When pain is well controlled, patients are more mobile and cough and deep breathe better, reducing risks such as deep vein thrombosis and pneumonia related to immobility. When compared to single-injection peripheral nerve blocks, continuous peripheral nerve blocks (CPNBs) have been shown to decrease overall opioid use, deliver better patient satisfaction scores, and improve pain control. Pain control can play an integral role in length-of-stay (LOS) reductions – one study showed that the mean LOS decreased from 76.6 hours to 56.1 hours after implementing an enhanced-recovery-after-surgery (ERAS) pathway, which included CPNBs. Finally, pain symptoms are among the top reasons for an emergency room visit, potentially impacting the overall bundled costs in the 90-day bundle timeframe.

**MODEL FACILITIES FOR BEST PRACTICE**

Hospitals that have embraced the use of multimodal analgesia in combination with continuous regional blocks have realized superior outcomes for all of the CMS categories discussed:

- Dr. Auyong, from Virginia Mason Medical Center in Seattle, Washington, described statistically significant reductions in LOS, reductions in nausea, improved ambulation distance, and reduction in readmission rates by >50%, with a multimodal analgesic regimen employing the use of continuous regional blocks for total knee replacements. In addition to continuous regional blocks, the regimen included a total knee arthroplasty education class, an at-home care companion, medications (transdermal scopolamine patches and intravenous dexamethasone), spinal anesthesia, fluid management, tranexamic acid utilization, physical therapy, and post-op oral analgesics.

- Dr. Frenk, at Stamford Hospital in Stamford, Connecticut, demonstrated similar results with the use of continuous paravertebral blocks and gabapentin for mastectomy patients; LOS was reduced, as well as overall opioid consumption.

- Continuous regional fascia iliaca blocks with multimodal analgesia for hip fracture patients reduced LOS, decreased overall opioid consumption, and reduced pain scores at Miami Valley Hospital in Dayton, Ohio, as described by Dr. Dulaney-Cripe. A poster presentation by Kettering Health Network (Kettering, Ohio), highlighted at the 2015 American Society for Pain Management Nursing National Conference, reported a 25% reduction in readmission rates for hip fracture patients that received continuous fascia iliaca compartment blocks – in combination with a protocolized clinical pathway.

- Dr. Truitt at Methodist Dallas Medical Center realized a three-day reduction in LOS for rib fracture patients that received a continuous infusion of local anesthetic via paraspinous catheters.

- A large meta-analysis comparing continuous nerve blocks to single-shot nerve blocks has demonstrated decreased nausea, reduction in opioid use, decreased LOS, and improved patient satisfaction, all with statistical levels of significance.

- Dr. Duncan at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, additionally described the economic benefits of a clinical pathway incorporating continuous nerve blocks for total knee arthroplasty. The study revealed that this pathway provides a significant reduction in the estimated total direct medical costs.
SUMMARY
In conclusion, the use of multimodal analgesia incorporating continuous regional blocks offers superiority when compared to traditional analgesic practices of the past. The research included in this piece focuses on the LOS, patient satisfaction and opioid consumption benefits of continuous regional analgesia—but new studies are emerging that measure readmission rates under this pain management approach, revealing significant reductions in that arena, as well. Progressive healthcare facilities are actively employing the use of this strategy to improve reimbursement associated with value-based purchasing.

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