

# OVERCOMING THE MOST COMMON CHALLENGES IN ACUTE PAIN MANAGEMENT

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Outpatient surgery centers encounter many acute pain management challenges, both clinically and financially. At UnaSource Surgery Center (USC), located in the Detroit metropolitan area, we face challenges largely driven by the needs of three constituents:

- **Surgeons:** Surgeons want to work in high-quality centers that make efficient use of their time. They count on centers to keep patients happy, which translates to minimal issues and increased patient satisfaction.
- **Patients:** Patients seek cost-effective care alternatives through ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs) and outpatient programs. In most cases, angst and anxiety about potential pain is the most common concern.<sup>1</sup> Pain is a reality of surgery, but effectively managing pain is the most significant contributor to patient satisfaction.<sup>2</sup>
- **Owners and investors:** Owners and investors want to keep their centers busy handling a steady amount of cases. This is partially enabled by offering a progressive pain management program desirable to prospective patients. In some cases, patient satisfaction is a consideration in reimbursement,<sup>3</sup> which may impact profitability and the ability to provide distributions.

Among the many clinical challenges, surgery centers sometimes struggle to demonstrate effective techniques for managing acute pain for procedures, such as total knee replacements. Facilities must gain the confidence of patients, surgeons, and payers. Some surgery centers are also challenged by the ability to deliver thorough patient education to manage expectations. The lack of education can create anxiety,<sup>4</sup> which may lead patients

to “put on blinders” and develop inaccurate perceptions and expectations about their upcoming surgery. In some cases, facilities are challenged by the ability to develop an effective acute pain management program to manage, implement, and achieve the desired outcomes. This is perhaps the most important challenge to overcome, as an effective pain management program benefits every department. For example, in the recovery room, patients can be released more quickly with pain pumps,<sup>5</sup> since they are more awake and alert.

Fortunately, clinical challenges can be solved in many ways. Without a doubt, the key to pain management is a strong multimodal solution.<sup>6</sup> At USC, a busy multispecialty surgery center with five operating rooms, this multimodal solution includes a regional anesthesia program with continuous peripheral nerve blocks (CPNBs) and the Avanos ON-Q\* non-narcotic elastomeric pump. ON-Q\* automatically and continuously delivers a regulated flow of local anesthetic, providing targeted pain relief for up to three days. We use this approach successfully with more than 5,500 cases per year, including a large number of sports orthopedic and knee replacement cases.

**Patients often seek a facility that can demonstrate effective techniques for managing acute pain**

In addition to effective post-operative acute pain management, you must earn the trust and confidence of patients with frequent and clear communication. Patient

education is key, from the pre-operative consultation and through the recovery process. At USC, we provide a lifeline for our patients with regular communications and high availability to answer calls and resolve issues through the post-operative process. This also often helps reduce the instances when surgeons are contacted with issues that the center can handle.

Best practices in acute pain management on the clinical side can also help resolve financial challenges as well. For example, pain management is one of the most significant factors in patient satisfaction,<sup>2,7,8</sup> and can often lead to increased scores on Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) surveys.<sup>1,2</sup> For facilities where payers consider satisfaction scores, effective pain management through ON-Q\* can produce improved scores that lead to increased reimbursement under the Value Based Purchasing requirements.<sup>9</sup>

Another one of the most common financial obstacles administrators face is the ability to receive appropriate reimbursement from payers. In many cases, this requires providers to deliver data that explains specific patient services rendered. Without this data, it can be difficult for providers to receive contract adjustments that result in appropriate payments.

The solutions to most financial challenges are related to effective data collection, and then refining processes to improve experiences for all constituents. Start by capturing costs. Determine how much you're spending on the program and what you're receiving in return. At USC, we solve financial challenges by establishing policies and procedures within our center to accurately collect patient services that will be reported to payers.

From both a clinical and financial standpoint, it's important to ensure that you have an efficient acute pain management process in place. You'll find that solutions to clinical and financial issues complement and enhance each other. Accomplish this by hiring competent clinicians, offering comprehensive training programs and providing best-in-class materials, while also keeping an eye on costs. When both types of challenges are remediated, patients enjoy greater confidence and surgical experiences, physicians are more satisfied, and the business operates more effectively and profitably.

*Amie Starkey has a consulting/speaking financial relationship with Avanos Medical, Inc.*

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