

April 28, 2009

Letter to the Editor
Health Affairs

In their article on health system reform in the March/April issue, Janet Corrigan and Dwight McNeill conclude that new organizational models will be needed to improve the way healthcare is delivered in this country. What their article fails to point out, and what has been left out of much of the debate on healthcare reform, is that physicians have already created a new delivery model that works well, improves the quality of care and reduces costs for both payers and consumers.

Ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs) are a delivery model that provide exactly the focus and care environment outlined in the article. This comes from being owned by physicians who have risked their own capital to create a model that delivers outstanding care efficiently, and that is patient focused and cost effective. ASCs are the “focused factory” that healthcare expert Regina Herzlinger says are critical to fixing our healthcare system.

For more than 20 years there has been a steady movement of surgical procedures from inpatient acute-care hospitals to ASCs and other outpatient surgical facilities. More than 40 percent of the 50 million surgical procedures performed annually in the U.S. have moved out of the hospital and are now done in the 5,000 plus ASCs or other outpatient settings. Procedures in the ASC are reimbursed by Medicare at an average of 59 percent of the cost of the same procedure done in a hospital outpatient facility, which saves literally billions of dollars each year.

As our population ages, the need for frequently utilized procedures like diagnostic colonoscopies and cataract surgery will continue to increase and the demand will only be met if we continue to have a strong outpatient delivery model, such as the ASC. These facilities are a critical component of a healthcare delivery system that provides consumer with convenient, efficient, affordable, quality care.

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