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Frequently Asked Questions About Ambulatory Surgery Centers

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Q. What are Ambulatory Surgery Centers?

A. Ambulatory Surgery Centers (ASCs) are facilities where surgeries that do not require hospital admission are performed. They provide a cost-effective and convenient environment that may be less stressful than what many hospitals offer. Particular ASCs may perform surgeries in a variety of specialties or dedicate their services to one specialty, such as eye care.

Patients who elect to have surgery in an ASC arrive on the day of the procedure, have the surgery in an operating room, and recover under the care of the nursing staff, all without a hospital admission.

Q. Are ambulatory surgery centers also known as rural health clinics, urgent care centers, or any other ambulatory care centers that provide diagnostic or primary health care?

A. ASCs are not similar to rural health clinics, urgent care centers, or other ambulatory care centers that provide diagnostic or primary health care. ASCs treat only patients who have already seen a health care provider and selected surgery as an appropriate treatment. Physician offices are not ASCs. All ASCs must have at least one dedicated operating room and the equipment needed to safely perform surgery and ensure quality patient care.

Q. How long have outpatient surgery centers been in existence?

A. The first ASC opened in 1970. Today about 20 million surgeries are performed each year in the more than 5,000 surgery centers across the United States.

Q. Does the federal government recognize ASCs?

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A. Yes, since 1982, when Medicare began reimbursing ASCs, ASCs have saved the program a significant amount of money. One study shows that, in 2005 alone, ASCs will save Medicare and its beneficiaries \$1.1 billion. ASCs that receive Medicare payments must meet the program's certification criteria and receive payments only for procedures that have been approved for reimbursement by the federal government. Today, Medicare beneficiaries can have more than 2,500 different procedures performed in an ASC. Medicare beneficiaries receive approximately 30% of the care provided in ASCs.

Q. Are outpatient surgery centers subject to regulation?

A. Yes. ASCs are some of the most highly regulated health care providers in the country. Medicare has certified 85% of the ASCs, and 43 states require ASCs to be licensed. These states also specify the criteria that ASCs must meet for licensure. Both states and Medicare survey ASCs regularly to verify that the established standards are being met.

In addition to state and federal inspections, many surgery centers choose to go through voluntary accreditation process conducted by their peers. ASCs that want to demonstrate a commitment to quality can seek accreditation from one of four accrediting bodies. All four are recognized by Medicare for their rigorous adherence to the highest standards of quality care. All accredited ASCs must meet specific standards that are evaluated during on-site inspections. As a result, patients visiting accredited ASCs can be assured that the centers provide the highest quality care.

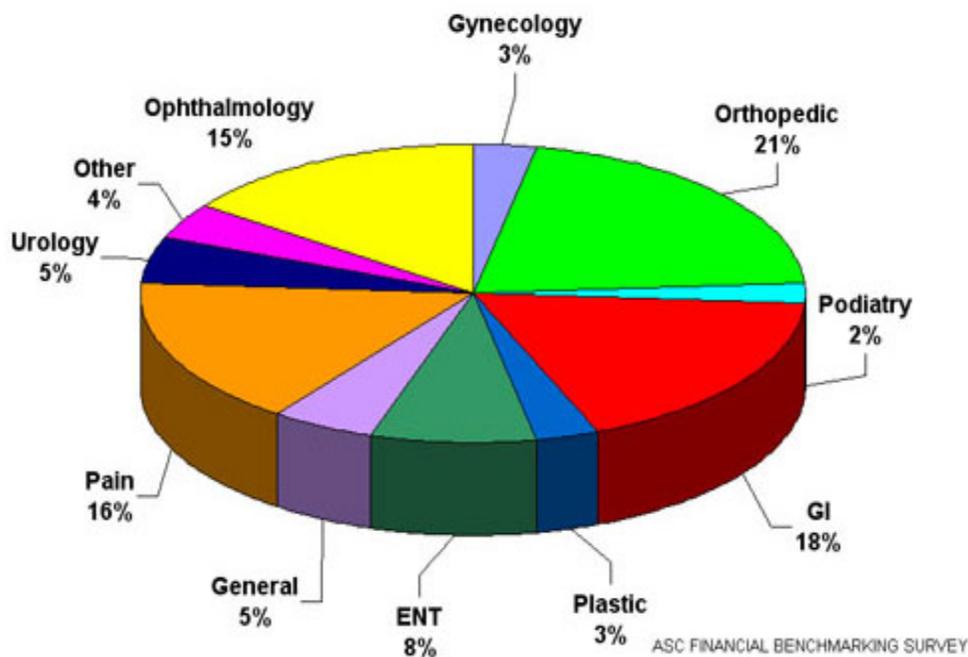
Q. What types of surgery are typically performed in outpatient surgery centers?

A. In 2002, the majority of procedures performed in ASCs were in either ophthalmology or gastroenterology. Particular ASCs may perform surgeries in a variety of specialties or dedicate their services to one specialty, such as eye care. 42% of ASCs specialize in a single specialty while 58% provide services in multiple specialties.

Specialty Distribution

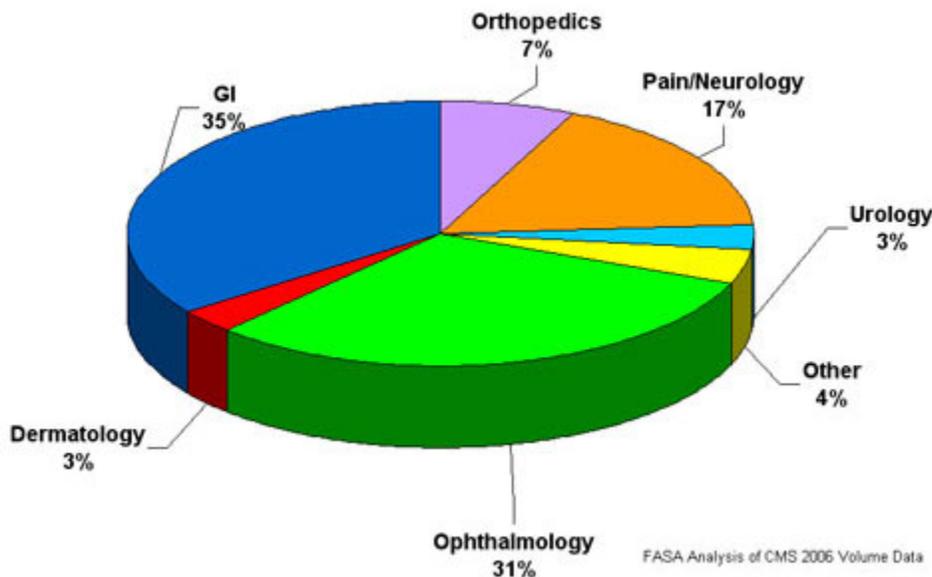
% of Total Patient Cases

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Specialty Distribution

% of Medicare ASC Procedures



Q. Why are ASCs a good choice?

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A. Patient satisfaction is a hallmark of the ASC industry. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General surveyed Medicare beneficiaries who had one of four procedures in an ASC. He found that 98% of the people were satisfied with their experience.

One reason for high patient satisfaction is convenient scheduling. According to the ASC Association's Outcomes Monitoring Survey, more than half of ASCs started more than 71% of their cases on time. Patients also choose ASCs for their high level of professionalism and safety. FASA's survey shows that over 50% of ASCs had fewer than two complications per 1,000 encounters and that over 95% of their medical staff is board certified. Another reason patients like ASCs is value. A 1977 study conducted by Blue Cross Blue Shield revealed that, on average, procedures performed at ASCs cost 47% less than those same procedures performed on hospital inpatients.

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