

What Are Ambulatory Surgery Centers?

Ambulatory surgery centers, or ASCs, are facilities where surgeries that do not require hospital admission are performed. ASCs provide cost-effective services and a convenient environment that is less stressful than what many hospitals can offer.

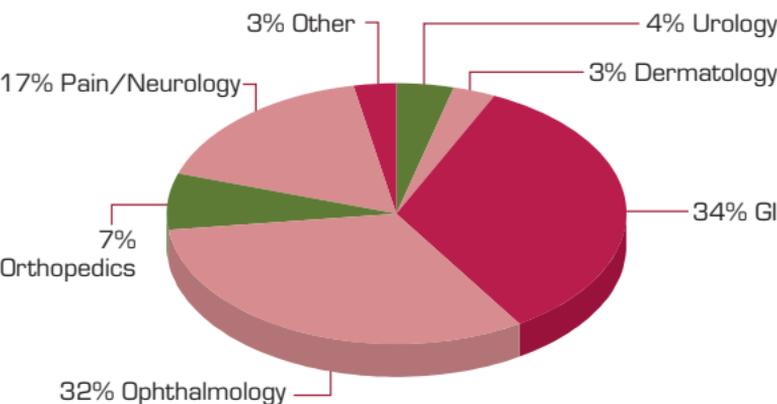
Patients who choose to have surgery in an ASC arrive on the day of their procedure, have their surgery in a fully equipped operating room and recover under the care of highly skilled nurses, all without hospital admission. Whether they are young or old or somewhere in between, patients and their families benefit from the comfortable environment ASCs offer.

ASCs may perform surgeries in several specialties or dedicate their services to one specialty, such as eye care or sports medicine.

What ASCs Are Not

ASCs are *not* rural health clinics, urgent care centers or ambulatory care centers that provide diagnostic or primary health care services. ASCs treat only patients who have already seen a health care provider and selected surgery as the appropriate treatment for their condition. ASCs are not physicians' offices either. All ASCs must have at least one dedicated operating room and the equipment needed to perform surgery safely and ensure quality patient care.

Specialties Served in ASCs



Based upon 2006 Medicare data.

Small Businesses in Your Community

ASCs, sometimes called surgicenters, are usually small businesses owned by members of their community. In fact, 70 percent of ASCs have 20 or fewer full-time employees. These small, community-based businesses benefit their communities not only by providing access to reasonably priced surgical care, but also by contributing to the local property and income tax bases and providing services and contributions to community charities. ASCs also make significant contributions to their communities as family-friendly employers that usually offer good health and retirement benefits and often offer flexible work schedules to their employees.

Several anesthesiologists opened the first ASC in Phoenix in 1970 to provide high-quality, cost-effective surgical care to their patients. Continuing that tradition, most ASCs today are owned and operated by community physicians. Some ASCs are jointly owned by local hospitals and physicians. By involving physicians in their management, ASCs ensure that those who are committed to providing topnotch patient care and actually deliver that care are also choosing the equipment and designing the policies they need to provide that care. This makes ASCs great places for physicians to practice and great places for patients to receive care.

For nearly four decades, ASCs have worked to improve patient care and advance outpatient surgery. As a result, ASCs have introduced a number of health care innovations that benefit all patients, not just those who receive care in ASCs.



Accreditation, Certification and Licensing

ASCs are regulated in many ways. Most provide care to Medicare beneficiaries and, thus, must meet Medicare standards and be approved by the federal government. In virtually every state, ASCs must meet specific requirements and obtain a state license. To obtain Medicare certification, and usually to obtain a state license, an ASC must have an inspection conducted by a state official or a representative of an organization that the government has authorized to conduct that inspection. These inspectors actually visit the ASC to verify that it meets established standards.

ASCs that want to demonstrate their commitment to quality can seek accreditation from one of four accrediting bodies approved by Medicare. All accredited ASCs must meet specific standards that are evaluated during on-site inspections. Patients who visit accredited ASCs can be assured that those ASCs meet high standards.

The ASC Association, too, has always done its part to ensure top-quality health care from the nation's ASCs. It requires all of its facility members to be accredited, licensed or Medicare certified. The ASC Association was instrumental in forming the accrediting body that

is now the largest accreditor of ASCs. The ASC Association works with all ASC accrediting bodies to assure that appropriate standards and processes are used to evaluate ASC quality. In 2002, the ASC Association initiated the CASC (Certified Administrator Surgery Center) credential, the only ASC-specific credential available today. Individuals who earn the CASC credential demonstrate their expertise in ASC administration, and so far, more than 400 people have done so. The ASC Association also assists



ASCs in 2008

- >5,000 ASCs
- In all 50 states
- Provide >22 million procedures annually

ASCs in meeting quality standards by conducting numerous educational programs and operating a nationwide outcomes monitoring project. More than 500 ASCs now participate in that project each year.

A Good Choice for Many Reasons—Quality, Customer Service and Cost

Patient satisfaction is a hallmark of the ASC industry. When the US Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Inspector General surveyed Medicare beneficiaries who had one of four procedures in an ASC, it found that 98% of the people were satisfied with their experience.

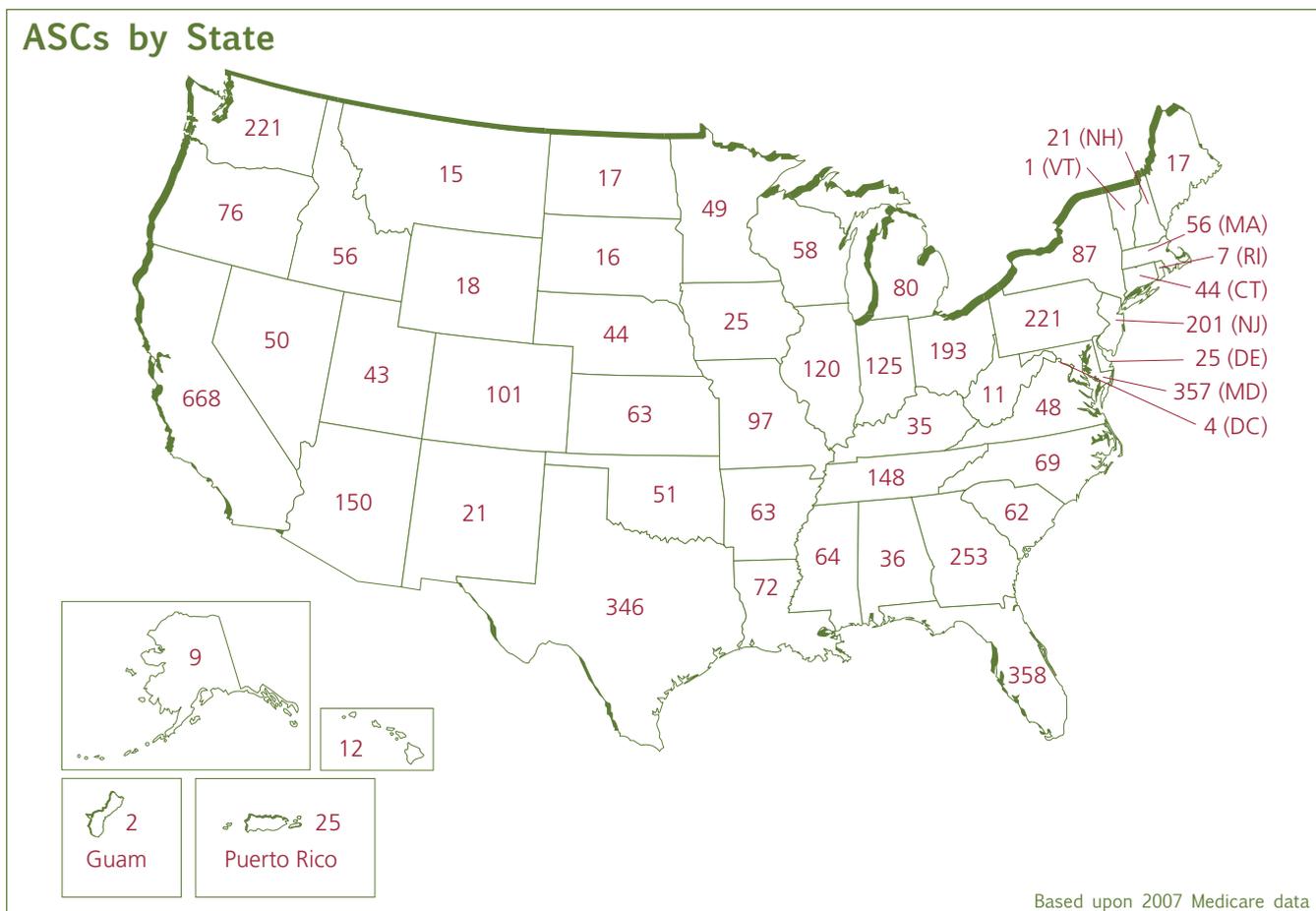
The high level of professionalism, quality and safety ASCs offer is an important reason patients and physicians choose ASCs for surgical procedures. More than 75% of ASCs have a medical staff board certified rate of greater than 90%. A 2007 report shows that, during a three-month period, 71% of ASCs did not have a single complication per 1,000 patient encounters; 69% did not transfer even one patient to a hospital during that time. More than 90% of ASCs report three or fewer infections per 1,000 patient encounters. In fact, studies overwhelmingly show that the quality of care delivered in ASCs is equal to or better than comparable hospital care.

Other reasons patients and physicians choose ASCs for surgical care are convenient scheduling and reliable service. For example, nearly a third of ASCs report that greater than 90% of their surgeries start within seven minutes of the time the procedures are scheduled to begin.

In addition to providing high-quality health care and excellent service, ASCs save patients and insurers money. For example, Medicare and its beneficiaries pay an average 54% more for a procedure performed in a hospital outpatient department than they would pay for the same procedure if performed in an ASC. The US Department of Health and Human Services has long recognized the benefits of ASCs. For example in 1999, its Office of the Inspector General said, "We agree that ASCs can significantly reduce costs for Federal health care programs, while simultaneously benefiting patients."

ASCs & Medicare

Since 1982, when Medicare began reimbursing ASCs, ASCs have saved the program a significant amount of money. In fact in 2006 alone ASCs saved Medicare and its beneficiaries 1.7 billion dollars, and it is estimated Medicare savings will equal that in 2008. ASCs that receive Medicare payments must meet the program's certification criteria and receive Medicare payments only for procedures that have been approved for reimbursement by the federal government. Today, Medicare beneficiaries can have more than 3,300 different procedures performed in an ASC. Medicare beneficiaries receive approximately 30% of the care provided in ASCs.



Let's Get Acquainted

ASCs are changing the face of health care in your community. They are offering top-quality care at cost-effective prices and expanding access to surgical services.

At the ASC Association, we are eager to help you become better acquainted with our nation's ASCs and the people who own and operate them. We are also eager to help you develop policies on ASC-related issues.

If you have questions, please contact us. We'll put you in touch with the experts and, if you like, arrange for you to visit an ASC in your area.

ASC Association

The ASC Association is the national, nonprofit association that represents the interests of those who operate, provide health care in and seek the services of ASCs.

To advance ambulatory surgery, the ASC Association

- works with legislative and regulatory bodies
- liaisons with other organizations concerned with improving access to and reducing the costs of health care
- encourages private insurers and the Medicare and state programs to provide insurance coverage and establish reasonable standards for ASCs
- publishes ASC resources, including a bimonthly journal, books and survey reports
- conducts educational programs on ASC issues
- informs the public about ASCs



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