

Day surgery

Trends in practice

In the future, healthcare providers will be challenged to deliver a day surgery service that achieves maximum efficiencies for both the hospital and the patient; and to embrace the ongoing evolution of day surgery as being responsive to progressive and innovative change.

Annette Hughes



Specific facilities for day surgery were first introduced in the US in the 1960's to free hospital beds and to increase convenience for both patients and physicians. Over the past 50 years, day surgery has become firmly established across all developed economies, both in public and private healthcare sectors.

In the US, up to 80% of all operative procedures are now carried out at day surgery facilities and the NHS is currently predicting that 75% of all elective operations will be carried out as day cases in the near future. This represents a significant development, with just 18% of all admissions in England in 1985 treated as day cases.

The US and Canada, followed closely by the Scandinavian countries, are currently setting the pace as regards the uptake of day surgery internationally. This is in contrast with the situation in Ireland, where data shows that

just 50% of all elective surgery is performed in a day surgery setting.

This shortfall is the result of a combination of issues. Firstly, unlike in other markets, there is no clear classification on what constitutes a day surgery procedure. In the UK, for example, day surgery procedures are classified under a 'Basket of 25', with current indicators showing that close to 90% of some of these procedures are carried out in a day surgery setting. Another factor which may influence day case numbers is the inappropriate use of day surgery beds to accommodate in-patients, resulting in the cancellation of day cases.

Notwithstanding this shortfall, there remains a significant move towards day surgery, with a number of key influencing factors. The increasing concentration of the population in urban and suburban communities has resulted in highly mobile population densities, with

the development of medical and information technology allowing and promoting the provision of increasingly sophisticated techniques in combination with decreasingly intensive post procedural care.

In addition, advances in surgical techniques have also meant that day surgery can be considered now for procedures where this was not possible in the past, while the introduction of dedicated pre-assessment clinics to prepare the patient holistically for their day surgery has significantly reduced post-operative complications. Finally, increasing evidence is indicating that day surgery can offer significant advantages over in-patient surgery.

The development of day surgery is also being driven by consumer demand. Today's patient is seeking a more convenient, timely and comfortable surgical experience, and this, coupled with hospitals' natural desire to achieve cost and time efficiencies wherever possible, has led to a rapid rise in day surgery facilities. These include recovery centres staffed by registered nurses, offering hotel-standard private rooms, and providing extended recovery facilities as an alternative to full hospital admission.

This ever-evolving process has resulted in some procedures, such as cataract surgery, moving out of the traditional domain of day surgery units and into out-patient clinics. Home care and home nursing has also been a key progression, facilitating day surgery for patients who would otherwise require in-patient care, but allowing them to recover at home rather than in hospital.

From a broader perspective, the increased worldwide investment in healthcare, investment in healthcare worldwide has been on the increase for some time now and the Irish healthcare system is no different in this respect, with a drive to modernise the service and expand capacity two chief goals. Using existing capacity as efficiently as possible is crucial, with day surgery identified as a means to achieve this.

This strategic and planned utilisation of existing capacity would take pressure off acute beds, and would dovetail with the increased emphasis on the efficient use of beds within

hospitals. The potential to increase day surgery procedures, such as soft tissue and orthopaedic procedures, will play a very important role in the overall bed utilisation in the future.

In the ongoing development of day surgery as a key component of hospital services there are a number of key factors to consider. The growing popularity of day surgery among patients is creating high levels of demand from the consumer, while many hospitals have been designed and developed around the model of in-patient care rather than day surgery treatment.

As the traditional hospital ambulatory focus continues to be challenged and reformed in some cases, it is likely that developments in day surgery may lead to the evolutionary successor of the contemporary hospital. These developments provide great challenges but also present major opportunities for innovative healthcare managers and physicians to reposition themselves for increased competition.

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Article at a glance

Increasingly sophisticated surgical and anaesthetic techniques are allowing for greater increase in day surgery procedures.

Escalating healthcare costs are responsible for the growth in day surgery worldwide.

Introduction of dedicated pre-assessment clinics has significantly reduced post-operative complications and admissions to inpatient beds.

Day surgery offers timely treatment, with less risk of cancellation, lower incidence of hospital acquired infections and earlier return to day-to-day activities.