

Patient and Staff Safety:

Creating a Culture of Safety in Ambulatory
Surgery Centers (ASCs)



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Introduction Summary

01

Laying the Foundation for a Safety-First Surgical Environment

Establishing a culture of safety within an Ambulatory Surgery Center (ASC) goes beyond clinical protocols—it requires an intentional mindset that prioritizes the well-being of patients, staff, and surgeons in every action and decision.

While most organizations strive for safe practices, true safety culture means embedding those practices into daily workflows, communication patterns, and leadership expectations.

This white paper introduces core strategies, practical implementation steps, and common challenges ASCs face when building a high-reliability safety framework. By aligning leadership, empowering staff, and standardizing accountability across operations, ASCs can ensure that safety is not just encouraged—it is consistently lived out at every level of operation.



- ✔ Structured Safety Strategy
- ✔ Leadership Alignment
- ✔ Staff Empowerment & Unity
- ✔ Reliable Safety Assurance

Defining the Culture of Safety

02

What Does a True Safety Culture Mean?

A culture of safety is more than policies – it is a shared mindset across every role within the ASC. At its core, it ensures patient harm is minimized, operational standards are consistently upheld, and staff feel protected and empowered to speak up. In a strong safety culture, problems are addressed openly, errors are reported without fear of blame, and continuous improvement becomes part of everyday practice.

Safety is a Shared Responsibility

Empowered Teams Drive Safer Outcomes

Collaboration Over Blame Builds Trust

Protection for Both Patients and Staff



Leadership, Education, and Coordination

03

Led by Example, Sustained by Learning

A resilient safety culture is built on visible leadership, continuous learning, and seamless teamwork. When leaders actively model safety protocols—not just endorse them—they signal that safety is a core organizational value, not a checkbox.

Leadership
Commitment

Team
Coordination

Continuous
Education

Ongoing education keeps staff aligned with evolving standards from organizations like CDC, AORN, and ASCA, ensuring both clinical teams and

patients are prepared for safe outcomes. Equally important is coordination: using tools such as checklists and patient-tracking systems enables every team member to stay informed, aligned, and accountable. When leadership, learning, and teamwork operate in harmony, safety becomes second nature across every role and routine.

● Leadership Commitment

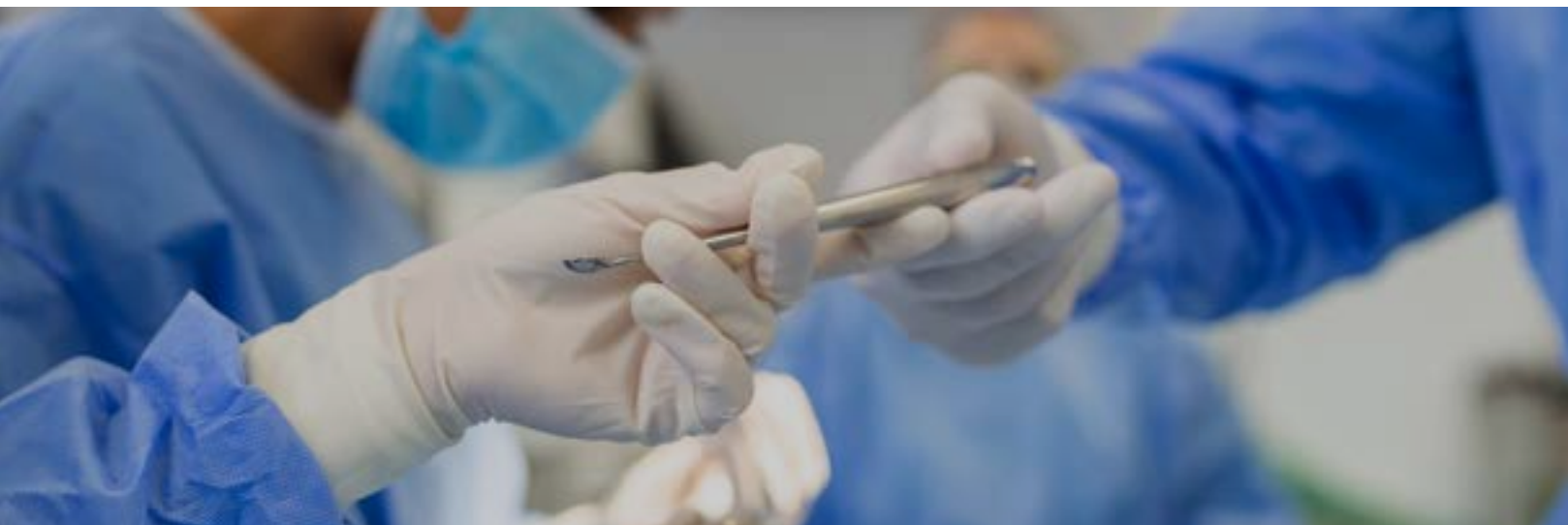
Effective safety culture starts with committed leadership. Leaders must actively practice and support safety protocols, demonstrating their importance to the team. This includes not only endorsing safety measures but also participating in safety training sessions and modeling the desired behaviors. When leadership visibly promotes safety, it sends a powerful message to the entire staff about the organization's priorities.

● Continuous Education

Safety standards and best practices are constantly evolving. Utilizing resources from organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Association of Perioperative Registered Nurses (AORN), and the Ambulatory Surgery Center Association (ASCA) for staff education is crucial. Regular training ensures that all personnel stay current with the latest safety measures. Continuous education should also extend to new technologies and procedures, ensuring staff are always prepared to handle emerging challenges and learn from mistakes. Educating patients is equally important. Well-informed patients are better prepared for their procedures and recoveries, which can significantly reduce the risk of complications.

● Team Coordination

Team coordination is essential to maintaining a seamless and safe ASC environment. It requires ensuring that all team members are aligned and aware of each patient's status and the necessary safety procedures. Tools such as patient-tracking software and standardized checklists help keep everyone informed and prevent missteps. With consistent use, these workflows become second nature, strengthening reliability and overall safety.



From Awareness to Action

Creating a culture of safety does not come without challenges. Identifying and addressing these obstacles head-on is essential to successfully implementing safety initiatives.



- ✓ Addressing Resource Gaps
- ✓ Time Management
- ✓ Disengaged Leadership
- ✓ Inconsistent Feedback Loops
- ✓ Overcoming Resistance

● Addressing Resource Gaps

Ensure all staff have the necessary skills and knowledge to adhere to safety protocols. Regular training and refreshers are essential for maintaining high safety standards. Providing the proper tools and resources for staff to perform their duties safely and effectively is equally important.

● Time Management

Evaluate and improve efficiencies in non-critical tasks to give staff more time to focus on safe care. Reducing paperwork and streamlining processes can significantly enhance the safety culture. Ensure staff do not feel rushed and have adequate time to perform safety checks and follow protocols.

● Disengaged Leadership

Leaders must not only send staff to safety seminars but also participate themselves. Demonstrating commitment to safety encourages staff to report mistakes and suggest improvements, fostering an open and honest safety culture. When leadership actively engages in safety efforts, it sets a positive example and reinforces the importance of safety throughout the organization.

● Inconsistent Feedback Loop

A culture of safety relies on effective communication and feedback. Without a robust system for recording and addressing safety concerns, staff may feel their input is ignored. Implementing clear and accessible reporting systems—and following up on feedback—is essential to maintaining an open and responsive safety culture. Regularly reviewing and acting on feedback helps identify and resolve issues before they escalate.

● Overcoming Resistance

Change can be met with resistance, especially if staff feel that new safety protocols add to their workload. Engaging staff in the development and implementation of safety measures is crucial, ensuring they understand the benefits and feel supported throughout the process. Providing clear explanations and involving staff in decision-making can help mitigate resistance and foster a more cooperative environment.

One must understand the ASC's current state to create a safety culture. How can this be achieved? Safety Culture Surveys.

Safety Culture Surveys

05

Understanding the Current State

A culture of safety survey is a tool used to assess the safety culture within an organization, particularly in high-risk industries such as healthcare, aviation, construction, and manufacturing. The survey aims to gather data on employees' perceptions and attitudes toward safety, identify areas for improvement, and promote a culture where safety is prioritized.

Utilizing Standardized Instruments

Benchmarking and Comparison

Prioritizing Improvements

Team Involvement



Here are key elements to consider when implementing safety surveys:

● Utilizing Standardized Instruments

Using standardized instruments to measure safety culture ensures consistency and reliability in data collection. Standardized tools, such as AHRQ's Ambulatory Surgical Center Surveys on Patient Safety Culture (ASC SOPS), allow for benchmarking and comparison across different ASCs, providing valuable insights into best practices and areas for improvement. These surveys cover various safety culture dimensions, including teamwork, communication, and error reporting. Utilizing a standardized survey

instrument helps ensure thorough and reliable feedback data.

● Benchmarking and Comparison

Comparing survey results over time and with other ASCs can provide valuable insights. Use these comparisons to set measurable goals and drive continuous improvement. Benchmarking against industry standards can also help identify best practices and areas where the ASC can improve.

● Prioritizing Improvements

After identifying areas of improvement from the survey results, focus on two or three key areas each year. Implement changes, measure outcomes, and follow up to ensure ongoing progress. Prioritizing improvements ensures that efforts are focused on the most critical areas, leading to more effective and sustainable changes.

● Team Involvement

Engage all staff actively in discussing survey results and collaboratively developing effective solutions. Ensure that all departments are consistently informed and meaningfully involved in safety initiatives, fostering a truly comprehensive and resilient safety culture. Involving staff throughout the process helps build stronger ownership, accountability, and sustained commitment to achieving organizational safety goals.

Conducting Effective Surveys

06

To ensure effective safety surveying, consider the following best practices:

- ✓ Clear Communication
- ✓ Anonymity and Confidentiality
- ✓ Comprehensive Staff Participation
- ✓ Survey Results and Feedback
- ✓ Regular Frequency

● Clear Communication

Clearly explain the purpose and importance of the safety survey to all staff. Ensure they understand how the survey results will be used to improve safety and patient care. Transparent communication helps to build trust and encourages honest feedback.

● Anonymity and Confidentiality

Guarantee anonymity and confidentiality to encourage honest feedback. Assure staff that their responses will not be used against them. Protecting the privacy of respondents is crucial for obtaining candid and accurate information. Using a third-party survey vendor has proven to be an effective approach to mitigating anonymity and confidentiality concerns.

● Comprehensive Staff Participation

Ensure participation from all levels of staff, from administrative personnel, nurses, anesthesiologists, and surgeons. A wide range of perspectives provides a more accurate picture of the ASC's safety culture. Encouraging broad participation ensures that all viewpoints are considered and addressed.

● Survey Results and Immediate Feedback

Provide immediate feedback to staff about the survey results and outline the steps that will be taken to address any issues. This demonstrates a commitment to transparency and continuous improvement. Prompt feedback helps to maintain momentum and shows that the organization values staff input.

● Regular Frequency

Conduct safety surveys regularly to track progress and identify new areas for improvement. Annual surveys are common, but the frequency can be adjusted based on the ASC's needs. Regular surveys help to maintain a focus on safety and track improvements over time.

Sustainable Practices

07

Building Long-Term Safety Excellence in ASCs

Implementing the following sustainable practices can significantly enhance both the safety culture and the operational effectiveness of Ambulatory Surgery Centers (ASCs).





● Leadership Visibility

Leaders should be visible and actively involved in safety initiatives. Regularly communicate with staff about safety goals and progress. Visible leadership involvement reinforces the importance of safety and encourages staff to prioritize it in their daily activities.

● Continuous Learning

Promote a culture of continuous learning by providing ongoing education and training opportunities. Encourage staff to stay updated on the latest safety protocols and best practices. Regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of safety initiatives. Use data from safety surveys and other feedback mechanisms to make informed decisions and adjustments. Continuous monitoring and evaluation help ensure that safety measures are effective and identify areas for ongoing improvement while fostering a learning culture, which is a critical component of a strong safety culture.

● Empowering Staff Through a Collaborative Environment

Empower staff to speak up about safety concerns without fear of retribution. Create an environment where everyone feels responsible for safety. Encourage open communication and enable staff to act on concerns to quickly identify and resolve issues.

● Recognition and Rewards

Recognize and reward staff contributions to safety improvements. This motivates others to participate actively in safety initiatives. Positive reinforcement encourages continued engagement and highlights the importance of individual contributions to overall safety.

● Integrated Safety Measures

Integrate safety measures into all aspects of the ASC's operations. From patient check-in to post-operative care, ensure safety protocols are consistently followed. Consistent application helps build a strong safety culture and reduces the risk of errors.

Closing Summary

08

Sustaining a Culture of Safety for the Long Term

Creating a culture of safety in an ASC is not a one-time initiative—it is a continuous journey that demands steadfast leadership, engaged staff, and strong systems for feedback and accountability. By embracing standardized measurement tools, acting on insights, and reinforcing safety protocols at every level, ASCs can build an environment where safety is consistently prioritized. When strategy, teamwork, and follow-through come together, high-quality care becomes not just an expectation—but a standard.

Continuous Improvement

Visible Leadership

Engaged Teams

Data-Driven Accountability



About Beterra

Beterra is a healthcare technology company focused on building tools for safety and quality management.

Our solutions help clients accelerate improvement via collection, analysis, sensemaking, and safety and quality data utilization.

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