

Surgery centers to voluntarily report errors

By Kayley Mendenhall / *The Bulletin*

Sue Nance believes that ambulatory surgery centers shouldn't fear reporting medical errors.

As the chief executive of Bend Surgery Center, Nance said she recently participated in a statewide committee to help the Oregon Patient Safety Commission adopt reporting rules for ambulatory surgery centers. Those rules were adopted by the commission last week and surgery centers will be asked to start voluntarily reporting problems to the state within the next few months.

"I think it offers transparency, and I think it will clear up some of the misconceptions about (ambulatory surgery centers). I think if you are accredited you shouldn't be afraid to participate," Nance said. "It just makes us a more credible entity all around."

Ambulatory surgery centers are facilities where outpatient surgeries not routinely performed in a physician's office are conducted, said Jim Dameron, executive director of the Oregon Patient Safety Commission. There are about 75 in the state, including six in Bend and Redmond, that do eye surgeries, orthopedic surgeries, plastic surgeries, lumpectomies, tonsillectomies and more.

"The likelihood of serious adverse events is probably less than in hospitals because the cases they deal with are less serious," Dameron said. "But we don't know a lot. We don't know about infections or follow-up. But this is a way to start seeing, a fairly painless way, to start looking at it."

The Oregon Patient Safety Commission was created by the Oregon Legislature in 2003 to lead a statewide effort to reduce medical errors. The commission first adopted reporting rules for hospitals more than a year ago, followed by pharmacies, long-term care facilities and now ambulatory surgery centers.

For now, the same-day surgery centers associated with hospitals are not included under this section of the commission's reporting rules. Dameron said those facilities are expected to report medical errors as part of the hospital reporting system.

Nance said the Bend Surgery Center is accredited by The Joint Commission, a national accrediting agency, and already reports adverse events on that level. Now, the group will also report to the state if patients have to be admitted to the hospital within 48 hours after their surgery, if surgery is conducted on the wrong patient or the wrong part of the body, or if a patient dies.

As with all Oregon Patient Safety Commission's reporting programs, participation for ambulatory surgery centers is voluntary and centers will not be identified in reports

charting medical errors, Dameron said. They also are not punished in any way for admitting to mistakes, nor will the information be made available to the public. The goal of the commission is to track medical errors, identify causes of errors and ways to avoid them and to share that information with other participating groups.

"It's always the three-step test," Dameron said. "Will they sign up? Will they share and can we do something useful with the information?"

So far, he said, it seems that ambulatory surgery centers are interested in participating on a statewide level. Mike Gonsalves, director of operations for Cascade SurgiCenter in Bend, said his facility is planning to participate.

"With regard to public safety, it makes a lot of sense," Gonsalves said. "Individuals are increasingly knowledgeable about their health care and should be."

As consumers become more and more involved in choosing where they receive their health care, Nance said she believes reporting could give ambulatory surgery centers a chance to prove how safe they are.

"Infection rates, they are historically lower in an (ambulatory surgery center) than in a hospital. Complication rates are low. Hospital admits are very low," Nance said. "This would put that out there."

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