

# Ambulatory Surgery

## In General

Improved technology has made ambulatory surgery possible. For plan purposes, ambulatory surgery means those surgical procedures, formerly requiring hospitalization, which can now be safely performed in an outpatient setting. It does not include those minor surgical procedures customarily performed in a doctor's office. An ambulatory surgical facility may be affiliated with a hospital or operated independently.

For purposes of plan benefit determination, an ambulatory surgical facility is an institution which meets *all* of the following criteria:

- Is established, equipped, and operated solely for the purpose of performing surgical procedures.
- Does not provide beds for patients to stay overnight and does not attempt to provide emergency care.
- Operates under the supervision of a staff of physicians and extends facility privileges to any physician who has privileges to perform said surgical procedure(s) at least one local hospital.
- Is equipped to perform diagnostic X-ray and laboratory examinations appropriate to the surgical procedure performed or maintains a viable agreement with a state-licensed facility which provides these services.
- Provides the full-time services of one or more registered graduate nurses (R.N.) for patient care in the operating and recovery rooms (one registered nurse per room).
- Has the appropriate equipment and trained personnel necessary to handle foreseeable emergencies, such as cardiac arrest, airway obstruction and shock.
- Maintains a written agreement with one or more local hospitals for the immediate hospitalization of patients who develop complications or require postoperative confinement, and has an effective procedure for such transfer.
- Provides for periodic review of the quality and medical practice standards at the facility by a utilization review/quality assurance committee.
- Maintains adequate medical records for each patient.
- Is licensed pursuant to any applicable state or local law or approved by the appropriate state or local agency as meeting the standards for such licensing.

Surgical procedures currently being performed in an inpatient hospital setting will be performed in increasing numbers in ambulatory surgical facilities as these facilities increase in number, accessibility, and quality. To encourage the increased use of ambulatory surgical facilities in lieu of more costly inpatient hospital care, the plan's policy for ambulatory surgical facilities is as follows:

- Charges of an ambulatory surgical facility made in connection with performance of a surgical procedure may be recognized to the same extent that they would be recognized if made by a hospital, provided the expenses

are incurred on the date of the surgical procedure or, in the case of laboratory tests and x-ray examinations, within several days preceding the date of surgery.

- When the Surgical benefit is contingent upon confinement, surgical procedures performed in an ambulatory surgical facility shall be considered to have been performed in a hospital.
- In paying benefits for charges for ancillary services furnished by an ambulatory surgical facility, consider the charges as hospital charges incurred while confined.

Typically, ambulatory surgical facilities do not itemize their bills but render one all-inclusive charge for necessary ancillary services related to the surgery performed. It is the plan's practice to accept a facility's all-inclusive charge, if reasonable, without requesting a charge breakdown.

## Processing An Ambulatory Surgery

### In General

The examiner should ask two questions?

- Is the procedure a proper one for such facility?
- Is the facility a proper one as required by the plan document?

**Proper Procedure.** The plan document itself lists the major procedures which are candidates for ambulatory surgery.

**Proper Facility.** When the status of a facility is uncertain, the facility should be contacted and the following information obtained:

- Brochure of any literature describing the center.
- Listing of insurance companies and other administrators which accept the surgical center.
- Listing of *all* accreditation's held by the surgical center.

Approval of a surgical center means that the facility will be regarded as the equivalent of a legally recognized hospital and benefits will be paid accordingly.

### Office Surgery

Although use of ambulatory surgical facilities will increase, procedures currently being performed safely in a physician's office should continue to be performed there. Safety of surgery in the physician's office has been greatly increased by modern advances in antibiotic drugs and improved anesthetic techniques. Minor surgery, now possible in physician's office due to these medical advances, has a broad range within all surgical specialties. Procedures normally considered office-type procedures not necessitating hospital (or ambulatory surgical facility) care include but are not limited to:

- Chemotherapy or cryotherapy to remove surface skin lesions.
- Incision and drainage of simple cysts and abscesses.
- Arthrocentesis, aspiration and injection of finger or toe.

- Injection of sclerosing solution, single or multiple veins.
- Removal of surface foreign body from conjunctiva.

The performance of these relatively minor procedures should not be transferred to the ambulatory surgical center setting except in exceptional cases where the patient's age, diagnosis, or general condition warrant such transfer.