



# A MARKET OPPORTUNITY: PERIOPERATIVE OSA MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

by *Duane Johnson PhD*

**R**ecent CMS reimbursement changes, especially those related to portable monitoring for sleep evaluations have many independent sleep lab owners and hospital sleep professionals concerned about their future sleep business growth.

My response is to remind them that conservative estimates demonstrate there are 15 to 20 million people in the United States living with life threatening and life limiting, undiagnosed sleep apnea. The need to help these people is great. Neither portable monitoring nor traditional sleep lab studies will saturate this market need in the near future. Both diagnostic approaches

have a significant role to play in the sleep healthcare marketplace with many service niches untapped and available for development.

One critical area that needs attention from sleep professionals is perioperative management of sleep apnea. Patients with undiagnosed

OSA require monitoring and a specific care plan to reduce adverse events or death when receiving sedation and pain medications. Estimates are that over 20% of patients sedated for surgery and invasive procedures have undiagnosed OSA. This is a serious prevalence for potential adverse events and also a significant market opportunity for sleep services. The good news - patient risks can be predicted and reduced. Patient safety is being targeted by the American Society of Anesthesiologists and the Joint Commission (JCAHO), and they are continuing to develop more specific guidelines as research results become available.

Besides improving patient safety, medical liability for physicians, hospitals and outpatient surgery centers will be reduced with an effective perioperative management of OSA patients. And as new OSA patients are identified, an added revenue source can be initiated.

Currently there is no standardized protocol for perioperative sleep apnea management programs. While even a simple pre-surgical or pre-procedural patient screening approach will bring some positive benefit, an effective perioperative OSA management program must have several key elements to make a powerful impact on reducing patient risk factors.

My SCMI colleagues and I have developed a comprehensive perioperative management program called SAM (Sleep Apnea Monitoring). It includes a pre-surgical evaluation to screen patients for risk of OSA. When a patient is determined to be at risk for OSA the protocol alerts the anesthesiologist to develop an operative care plan that incorporates that vital information. Both diagnosed OSA patients and those patients considered at risk due to screening are managed by a specific protocol.

Following surgery, care of the OSA patients include being assessed and monitored by post-anesthesia care unit (PACU) personnel. SCMI's SAM program includes training PACU nurses in assessing signs and symptoms of OSA patients for adverse events. The training for nurses and assistants is hands-on and intensive; it is provided in your location by clinicians routinely working with OSA care plans.

Besides training for PACU staff, it is essential that all staff involved in the perioperative OSA protocol be well trained, including preoperative staff, anesthesiologists, surgeons, respiratory therapists, pulmonologists, sleep physicians and sleep staff. Since Positive Airway Pressure (PAP) will be used throughout the protocol, it is also important that everyone receives education and hands-on experience working with PAP to include auto-PAP and other PAP technology for complex apnea patients.

Patient monitoring must continue after discharge. The newly diagnosed patient must be encouraged to return for a sleep study. They must be educated about the dangers of ignoring treatment for sleep apnea. They need to understand how the risks for respiratory and cardiovascular complications are much higher for them, an individual with sleep apnea. Their chance of having work or auto related accidents due to sleepiness and fatigue is also significantly greater than the general population.

Opportunities for developing a niche in sleep medicine through integration of perioperative sleep apnea management remain great. Sleep professionals need to take an assertive leadership role in educating medical colleagues to create these patient safety opportunities. Then you will reap business growth.

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