Commentary: A time for change: Purpose, quality, and change during times of fiscal austerity

Jonathan Decker, DO,a and Richard Lazzaro, MD, FACSb

Health care systems have a mandate for fiscal austerity while maintaining the delivery of high-quality care. Controlling cost in the operating room is a requisite component of a cost-savings strategy for health systems. Studies have shown that cost awareness can reduce operating room expenditures.1,2 In this month’s Journal, Liu and colleagues3 implemented educational programs to raise surgeon awareness of operating room costs while subsequently applying a positive deviance program to measure the impact. Without decreasing resources or controlling intraoperative decision-making, the authors reported a significant trend in disposable costs as well as lower operating room time,3 and presumably without untoward adverse events. Many hospitals have attempted to identify ways to make cost-transparency a habit. MD Anderson has created a “Know Your Costs” campaign to incorporate behavioral “nudges” into operations, and according to Harvard Business Review, has saved nearly $1 million in supplies in 2018.4

Beyond cost savings for a specific surgical procedure, the process of improvement has impact beyond lobectomy. Being aware of performance can drive positive results while maintaining excellence in patient outcomes. Hospitals should continue to develop models that incorporate a surgeon’s competitive mentality and sustain long-term engagement in these policies. While physician-led hospitals account for less than 5% of hospitals with patient experience ratings, they received 14% of Healthgrades awards for outstanding performance in 2022.5 Furthermore, the

References