

## EMPLOYER ACTION GUIDE

# Vetting Surgery Centers of Excellence Solutions

## What Every Benefit Leader Should Ask Before Saying “Yes”

When evaluating a surgery centers of excellence (COE) solution, it's not enough to focus on basic network access or price points. A strong program should deliver better health outcomes, reduce total cost of care, and provide a seamless experience for Members—without exposing your organization to hidden risks or unexpected costs.

Get to the point faster and understand if a surgery COE solution will truly deliver on its promises. Here are key questions designed to help you assess the five pillars of an outcomes-focused COE.

### Appropriateness of Care

#### Does the COE Evaluate if Surgery is Even Necessary?

- **How does the solution determine if surgery is necessary?** A strong COE partner should avoid unnecessary procedures through expert reviews and second opinions, as well as clinical evaluations.
- **What percentage of employees are guided to non-surgical options instead?** Fewer surgeries often mean better outcomes and lower spend.
- **Does the solution intervene to help earlier in the process—before surgery is already scheduled?** Programs that step in early have more impact on both outcomes and cost.
- **Are their financial incentives aligned with your goals?** Vendors who profit from high surgical volume may prioritize procedure count over outcomes.

### Clinical Outcomes & Quality Assurance

#### Can Your Employees Trust the Quality of Care?

- **What is the COE's complication and readmissions rate?** Ask for outcomes data that includes key metrics like 30-day readmissions and surgical complications.
- **How are physicians and facilities selected and reviewed?** Pick a vendor who carefully checks and manages their providers to make sure they're high-quality, not just one that simply gives you a broad list of options.
- **Is there clinical oversight throughout the entire journey?** Clinician review at critical junctures optimizes proper protocols and ensures appropriate comprehensive care before and after surgery.
- **Do they measure quality at the surgeon level? Facility level? Procedure level?** Surgical outcomes vary widely. Make sure performance is objectively tracked across various levels.

## Member Experience

### Will Your Employees Love the Experience and Actually Use It?

- **What support do employees get throughout the journey?** Look for solutions that provide hands-on, personalized support with clinical oversight—not just access to care, regardless of quality.
- **How do they help employees navigate complex or scary moments?** Trusted guides, virtual support, and instant access to information are essential.
- **How is “local access” defined for your population?** What’s local in NYC isn’t the same as more rural areas—make sure the definition fits your footprint.

## Financial Predictability & Value

### Will it Reduce Your Total Cost of Care and Mitigate Surprises?

- **Is the price set up front—or variable based on the final bill?** Prospective bundles give you cost certainty; retrospective ones can hide volatility.
- **What’s included in the price—and what isn’t?** Make sure post-operative consultation, intraoperative imaging, and anesthesia aren’t billed separately.
- **Is there a risk of surprise billing for employees?** Ask what protections are in place to prevent unexpected charges.
- **How do they calculate ROI—and how do they prove it?** Savings claims should match up with your actual claims data, not just estimates.
- **Is the vendor’s revenue tied to how complex or costly a surgery is?**

## Account Management & Reporting

### Can You Track What Matters Most?

- **Do they provide clear, ongoing reporting on performance and savings?** You should know how the program is working at any given time.
- **Can they compare results side-by-side with your health plan or another vendor?** Get specifics—not just general ROI statements.
- **Will they help you align results with your broader benefits strategy?** A good partner should help you tell the story of impact—to leadership and to your people.



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help your team

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