

Health network

Skilled operators

The world keeps getting older. Population estimates show the 65-plus population tripling by mid-century, rising to more than 1.5 billion in the next 40 years as mortality rates drop across the globe. In the US, where the baby-boomer generation is starting to enjoy the golfing years, the number of seniors will soar to a projected 89 million by 2050. Quite apart from all the socio-political implications, this profound shift puts a considerable strain on healthcare providers everywhere. It also opens up new business opportunities.

Step forward AmSurg Corporation. From its headquarters in Nashville, AmSurg operates the largest network of outpatient surgery centres in the US. Spanning 32 states, its 200 centres offer hospital-quality care but at a lower cost. By focusing heavily on gastroenterology (intestines), orthopaedics (hip replacements) and ophthalmology (eyes) – high-volume, low-risk specialities that happen to affect higher proportions of senior patients – AmSurg is ideally suited to capitalise on the population bubble to come.

AmSurg has grown quickly over the past decade in what is still a very fragmented market of more than 5,000 certified surgery centres affiliated to half a dozen groups. "Our business model is pretty unique," says Todd Lunsford, vice president of strategy and marketing. "All of our surgery centres are partnerships with local physicians or physician groups. We typically own 51% and in return we assume the responsibility of managing the centres. That's the value proposition to our doctors: they get to have a financial interest in their surgeries without all the administrative burdens."

Assuring consistent quality control across such a dispersed network of semi-autonomous centres, governed as they are by so many local and regional differences, is a particular challenge for this and indeed any other 'distributed' workforce. It's a challenge that's been amplified by persistent innovations in medical procedures and the pending overhaul of the US's medical infrastructure as a result of President Obama's healthcare reforms. There are still no nationwide standards for electronic health records, for example, making data-sharing a nightmare. "Life was much simpler six or seven years ago," reflects Lunsford. "Now we are bombarded with so much new information

and technologies that it is very hard for our operations to be expert in every field."

AmSurg's newly introduced solution is one that will be very familiar to users of social media: a web-based portal that allows physicians to share privileged information and methodologies. "Doctors value interacting with one another," explains Lunsford. Called Partner Connect, the proprietary password-protected system was designed and implemented by California-based offshoring specialist Nagarro. "The challenge was finding a way

to integrate so many different software systems in order to achieve a uniform experience," notes Nagarro president Vishal Gauri. "We needed to make sure that physicians are able to talk to one another. In the end, the system was based around Sharepoint but with a lot of customisation."

Next, AmSurg has its sights on Europe, the most elderly continent in the world, where 29% of the population is projected to be 65 and older by 2050. If the US presented integration issues, Europe surely presents a whole new set of conundrums.

