



The Real Spend of Your IONM Program **Eight Tips to Discover the True Value**

In the ongoing effort to increase value in our healthcare system, hospitals are constantly asked to do more with less, such as finding ways to improve patient outcomes while containing and more effectively managing costs. While your OR is a primary revenue source, it is not exempt from these pressures. One potential way to increase value is to transition intraoperative neuromonitoring (IONM) services to a new outsourced partner with proven expertise. With IONM-supported cases conducted in your OR, such as spine surgery, neurosurgery, orthopedic surgery, and others, having the best neuromonitoring program partner is vital to your patients' safety and outcomes; however, the value you receive is also highly dependent on the partner you choose. The following provides key points you should review with potential IONM partners before choosing a provider.

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TRANSPARENT PRICING

A variety of IONM pricing models exist, including:

- Hourly Fee – All Cases
- Flat Fee/Case – All Cases
- Hourly Fee with Hourly Escalators
- Monthly Retainer

Ask potential IONM partners which models they offer and which is the best fit for you. Also discuss with them if there are any additional fees included in their pricing models to ensure you are aware of all charges associated with the provided services. Your chosen IONM partner should fully disclose the costs of the program to you and be transparent with their billing practices.

UNBIASED PATIENT-FIRST APPROACH

One of your primary drivers for leveraging an IONM partner is to offer a patient-first approach that helps improve outcomes and increase care quality. To ensure IONM partners are focused on putting the patient first, you should discuss any existing conflicts of interest or billing practices that may conflict with this approach, such as:

- Greater focus on selling equipment and technology rather than on IONM services, which can reduce the quality of the monitoring services
- Hidden service fees rolled into instrument or equipment costs
- Billing practices that are detrimental toward the patient, such as submitting charges that don't count toward in-network deductibles/accumulators
- Unnecessary billing for items, such as disposables (needles, electrodes, etc.)
- Balance billing the patient
- Sending patients to third-party collections agencies

SIMPLIFIED SCHEDULING AND CONTINGENCY/EMERGENCY SCHEDULING

The IONM service scheduling process should be simple to use and provide you with various communication methods to ensure you can use the one that works best for you. Discuss with potential IONM partners the types of scheduling processes they have available and how they are regularly working with customers to improve those processes to simplify scheduling needs.

Additionally, one of the benefits of working with an IONM partner should be that you no longer have to deal with stressful situations when a scheduled neurophysiologist unexpectedly becomes unavailable; however, this peace of mind can only be achieved if you ensure your IONM partner

maintains a large enough pool of neurophysiologists to draw from when issues arise. You should discuss with potential IONM partners the number of neurophysiologists they maintain, their recruiting process, and how they continuously work to ensure industry-leading neurophysiologists are always available. If an IONM partner does not maintain the necessary staff, they will have a diminished ability to support you when emergency or contingency scheduling is required.

ONGOING EDUCATION AND ADVANCED CERTIFICATIONS

Since third-party education programs do not currently exist, ask your IONM partner about their education and training process for their neurophysiologists. These questions can include:

- What didactic and clinical curriculum do you use?
- Is the program accredited and certified by The Joint Commission?
- What annual training and ongoing education opportunities do you provide?
- How does your program ensure neurophysiologists are always aware of the latest advanced skills and emerging techniques?
- What additional certifications do you encourage your neurophysiologists to obtain?
- How does your education and training program compare to other IONM partners?
- What opportunities for advancement does your program have to help retain IONM experts on a long term basis?

A benefit of working with an IONM partner is alleviating your burden of managing the training and education program, and the quality of the neurophysiologists working in your OR is dependent on how comprehensive their program is and the opportunity for advancement they provide. Understanding as much about their program as possible is necessary for you to properly compare potential IONM partners.

REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

While industry expectations exist, an IONM partner must establish their own quality standards to govern their program. We recommend that you ask to review an IONM service provider's clinical standards and ensure those standards parallel your expectations. Ideally, their clinical standards will not only meet your expectations or generally accepted IONM standards, but exceed them.

Additionally, as governmental agencies increase efforts to reduce fraud, waste, and abuse in healthcare, ensuring an IONM partner maintains a comprehensive compliance program is vital in protecting your hospital from incurring damages, penalties, criminal sanctions, and/or administrative remedies. Discuss with potential IONM partners how their compliance program helps them maintain their compliance, and in turn your compliance, with applicable laws governing the services they provide, including compliance with the Anti-Kickback Statue, the False Claims Act, HIPAA, and the

Stark Law. To demonstrate their commitment to compliance, they should have a full-time Chief Compliance Officer on staff dedicated to monitoring the program and constantly educating the company as laws and regulations change.

Another important indicator of compliance is if the IONM partner is accredited and certified by The Joint Commission, which demonstrates that the partner is focused on achieving a high degree of care quality and providing outstanding patient outcomes.

You should also ask about their ownership structure to determine if staff members are in a position to make or directly influence referrals or generate business for them or their customer facilities.

Finally, ensure that they adhere to practices that restrict the providing of certain items of value to customer facilities or related surgeons to alleviate the risk of implicating all parties under applicable laws. An IONM partner should be dedicated to helping you deliver quality healthcare services while minimizing the financial risks and reputational damage that can be caused by non-compliant partners.

DATA-DRIVEN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Using data to drive evidenced based medicine in the OR to improve patient outcomes and reduce risk has become vital to hospitals and their personnel. Ask potential IONM partners about their data collection and analysis process, and how they use data to improve their services and the healthcare industry. Investment in a comprehensive data process is a sign that your IONM partner is constantly working to advance the ways they provide their services and demonstrates a dedication to improving care quality. Without a thorough data collection and review process, a partner won't be able to identify areas where their services or your services require improvement. Also, ask them to discuss instances where they have worked directly with a customer to improve OR processes based on the results of their data analysis. These types of scenarios will demonstrate ways their data analysis process can benefit your hospital.

Additionally, while a potential partner may have an established data analysis process, the more cases they participate in, the more relevant their data and findings will be. Discuss with them the number of cases they work annually and compare that information with other potential vendors.

Finally, another way to help improve the overall delivery of healthcare is by sharing their research with the industry. Ask potential partners if they engage with other healthcare professionals to share knowledge by joining panels and committees, conducting lectures, and publishing research. This level of involvement with healthcare outside of the OR will result in them being identified as a leader in their industry.

SATISFACTION SCORES

Requesting information on the satisfaction of existing customers is an excellent way to evaluate how new customers will be treated. Ask potential IONM partners if they conduct customer satisfaction surveys, how those surveys are evaluated, how frequently they occur, and information on their rankings. Also, ask if they conduct similar satisfaction surveys with the surgeons they work with and how the surgeons have ranked them. Most IONM customers will only be as happy as their surgeons, so reviewing information from both surveys will provide you with the most complete view of how their neurophysiologists perform in the OR.

A common satisfaction measurement is Net Promoter Score (NPS), which is used broadly in most industries today to determine the loyalty between a vendor and a customer. The NPS can be used as a common comparison to other IONM service providers who also use this ranking system. Ask potential partners how they measure satisfaction and if they use NPS, for their actual NPS score to see how they rank against other providers and healthcare leaders. A potential partner that does not measure the satisfaction of their IONM services should be a red flag as you consider working with them.

REPORTING AND ANALYTICS

An IONM provider's data collection and analysis process should provide you with extensive information on how their neurophysiologists, as well as your overall OR team, are performing. Ask potential IONM partners for information on the types of reports they can provide, the frequency those reports are distributed, and their ad-hoc capabilities for generating reports based on custom requirements. These reports should allow you to not only review the performance of OR team members, but also conduct peer-to-peer comparisons, including performance across IONM procedures, medical centers, and surgical specialties. Insights gained from these reports can help drive exceptional patient care, identify opportunities to refine existing techniques or implement new protocols, and determine ways to reduce costs. Additionally, if data analysis can occur in real-time, an IONM partner can review procedure information with you as procedures are occurring, allowing them to work with hospital personnel to interpret the data and implement changes to practices and techniques almost immediately. This ability to access data as it evolves is invaluable, and the comprehensiveness of a partner's reporting capabilities should be one of the primary factors you review when choosing an IONM program.

Transitioning from an existing IONM partner is a decision that can provide your hospital with extensive benefits and improve value, from lowering costs and improving patient outcomes to increasing surgeon satisfaction and easing some of your hospital's administrative burden; however, choosing the best partner requires researching your options. The information in this article provides you with a list of the most important aspects to consider when reviewing potential candidates, which will help you alleviate future issues and ensure you receive the most benefits from your decision.

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SpecialtyCare is the leading provider of IONM services in the nation. With over 500 IONM professionals on staff, we annually support over 100,000 IONM procedures and work with 2,300 surgeons. Our surgical neurophysiologists support the world's leading surgeons to review and interpret data in real time and identify the early signs of evolving neural injury. That means interventions can be implemented promptly to avoid or mitigate long-term neural deficit. Having achieved both accreditation and certification from The Joint Commission and with over 30 years of IONM experience, SpecialtyCare's clients can be assured that we are dedicated to an ongoing commitment to clinical excellence and quality. SpecialtyCare's expertise in IONM helps reduce risk, improve efficiency, and ensure patient safety.

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