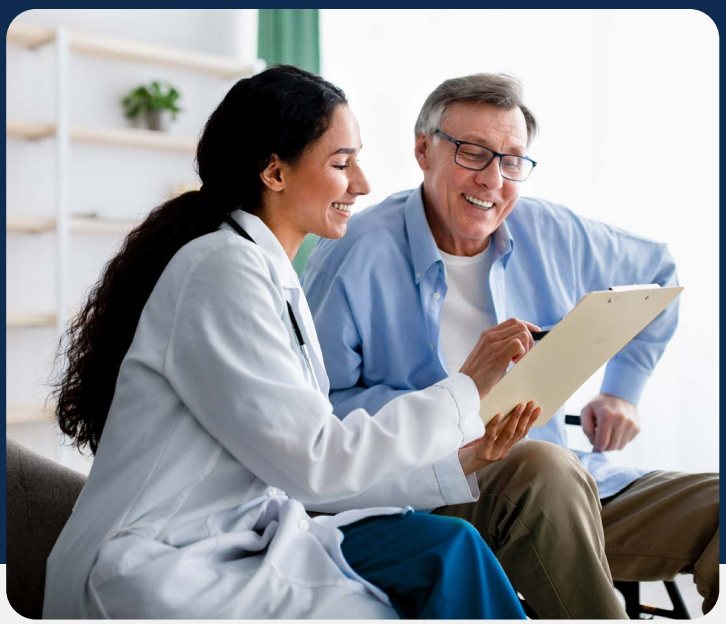


4 Tips Healthcare Leaders Can Consider to plan for Operational Stability

The balancing act of costs and operations

Running a hospital in 2026 might feel like performing surgery during an earthquake. Costs keep climbing, staff keep stretching thinner, supply chains keep hiccupping and patient expectations keep increasing from check-in to discharge. None of that is going away soon. What can change is how deliberately healthcare organizations plan for it. Stronger operational planning won't cure inflation or repair a broken supply chain overnight, but it can help leaders manage resources more predictably across facilities, departments and shifts with a little less improvisation and a lot more confidence.

1. Identify where the pressure is coming from

Operational strain rarely stays in its lane. It moves through clinical and administrative teams alike, showing up as short-staffed units, mounting paperwork, pricier supplies and patients who now expect hospitality-grade experiences alongside their care. Hospitals and health systems have spent recent years absorbing labor costs that have grown well beyond overall inflation, all while margins stay thin and reimbursement fails to keep pace.[1] Layer on persistent supply chain uncertainty and it's easy to see why "operational strain" isn't a buzzword so much as a daily reality.

The common pressure points tend to repeat themselves across organizations of every size:

- Staffing and workforce challenges
- Increasing administrative demands
- Rising costs across supplies and services
- Growing expectations for patient experience

Feeling squeezed on all four fronts at once isn't a leadership failure. It's the current state of the industry, and it's exactly why so many organizations are rethinking how they plan rather than simply how they spend.

2. Make planning intentional, not reactive

Operational planning plays a real role in helping healthcare organizations maintain consistency, both in patient care and in the internal workflows that support it. When planning becomes more intentional rather than reactive, organizations gain better visibility into recurring supply needs, reduce last-minute purchasing and supply gaps, strengthen coordination between clinical and administrative teams, and get ahead of demand fluctuations before they turn into service disruptions.

None of this is about eliminating surprises entirely; healthcare is unpredictable by nature. It's about making sure the predictable parts — staffing patterns, supply usage and seasonal surges — aren't adding unnecessary strain to an already complex system.



3. Get a clearer view of what's actually being used

A common challenge across healthcare environments is inconsistent supply usage from department to department. What the ICU burns through in a week looks nothing like what the front office needs, and without a structured view across the system, that variability quietly drives up costs and creates gaps at inconvenient times. More structured planning can help leaders identify high-use and recurring supply categories, standardize the ordering process across departments and improve inventory tracking and forecasting.

Key planning categories tend to fall into three buckets:

- **Patient care and clinical supplies:**
  - Medical furniture
  - Surgical supplies
  - Patient care items
  - Wound care
  - Diagnostic supplies
  - Medical wear
- **Facility operations:**
  - Surface cleaners and disinfectants
  - Restroom supplies
  - Cleaning and waste disposal
- **Office and administrative needs:**
  - Printers
  - Filing and folders
  - Mailing, packing and shipping

Getting ahead of these categories, rather than restocking in a panic when someone notices the supply closet is bare, helps keep departments running smoothly and staff focused on patients instead of scavenger hunts for supplies.

4. Build a disciplined approach to managing costs

Cost management remains a central priority for healthcare leaders, especially as margins tighten and every line item gets a second look. The good news is that smarter planning can create real savings without cutting corners on care. That can look like reviewing purchasing trends across departments, consolidating procurement processes, evaluating recurring supply usage, planning for emergency preparedness needs and preparing for seasonal demand fluctuations before they arrive uninvited. Administrative costs and supply chain volatility have both been cited as key financial pressure points for hospitals in recent years, which makes a disciplined, data-informed approach to purchasing less of a nice-to-have and more of a survival skill.[2] A little planning now tends to be a lot cheaper than a rush order later.



More than a vendor. A partner that helps you plan.

Stability rarely comes from one big fix. It comes from dozens of smaller, well-planned decisions made consistently across every department and every shift, decisions about what to stock, when to reorder, how to standardize and where to consolidate. That's where the right partner earns their keep.

ODP Business Solutions® supports healthcare organizations with products and operational resources designed to help simplify procurement, improve visibility and support day-to-day facility and administrative needs. From clinical and facility supplies to office essentials and everything that keeps a back office running as smoothly as the front line, ODP Business Solutions offers the breadth to consolidate vendors without sacrificing choice, along with the operational insight to help leaders plan ahead instead of catching up.

Whether the goal is standardizing supply orders across a multi-facility system, gaining sharper visibility into what departments are actually using, minimizing disruption to daily operations, or simply freeing up purchasing teams to focus on strategy instead of reactive buying, having the right partner in place may help teams focus on what matters most: patient care.

Learn how ODP Business Solutions can help support your healthcare organization's operational planning and procurement strategy.

[1] https://www.aha.org/guidesreports/2025-04-28-2024-costs-caring
[2] https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare/our-insights/what-to-expect-in-us-healthcare

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