The Surgeon Champion is the main advocate and mentor for ACS NSQIP, whose primary function is to assure the success of the program. As a direct link among multiple departments, the Surgeon Champion not only assists in unifying the interests of administration and surgeons, but also serves as a leader for quality improvement initiatives to foster positive outcomes for postoperative patient care. Overall, this individual represents the “surgical conscience” within their role for the entire hospital identifying where the benefits of the ACS NSQIP will compound their hospital’s already established quality improvement initiatives.

The Surgeon Champion also has a professional and consistent working relationship with the Surgical Clinical Reviewer. Collaboratively, they assist and support their hospital by reporting on reliable and clinically meaningful 30-day postoperative outcomes data to their healthcare colleagues and administration that result in positive impacts for all patients. Often the Surgeon Champion is the hospital’s Chief of Surgery, or another surgeon assigned by the Chief of Surgery.

Key responsibilities include:
- Main program spokesperson/advocate
- Oversees implementation and administration of the ACS NSQIP
- Leads/assists in QI initiatives
- Participates in Surgeon Champion conference calls
- Attends the ACS NSQIP National Conference (funding made available by hospital)
- Promotes a “Culture of Safety” while simultaneously adhering to fiduciary responsibility of the hospital

The role of the Surgeon Champion is much more than a textbook definition or a compiled job description. The first step to completely comprehending the role of the Surgeon Champion is to fully understand ACS NSQIP. Many surgeons initially think that ACS NSQIP is the solution to quality improvement. ACS NSQIP is NOT performance improvement and it is NOT the solution to all surgical problems. ACS NSQIP is a tool that provides actionable and credible data to enable continuous quality improvement. It provides participating hospitals and their surgical staff with the resources, reports, analysis, and support necessary to make informed decisions about improving the quality.

It is important for the Surgeon Champion to understand the potential of ACS NSQIP and to assess the short-term benefits that are achievable with this tool. Communicating expectations and prospective results clearly to the surgeons, nursing, and other administrators and leadership involved will help “sell” ACS NSQIP to everyone. A Surgeon Champion must ask themselves, “How can we use ACS NSQIP to
improve our patient care?,” “How do we unify the interests of Administration and Surgeons?”, “What individuals and groups will I need to get on board to achieve acceptance?”

A good Surgeon Champion must be trusted by his or her peers and administration. They should be persistent, have self-confidence, be comfortable interacting with others, and be a good listener. The Surgeon Champion will bring many specialties of a facility together, so good communication skills are a must. The nature of the Surgeon Champions relationships with others at the institution will ultimately determine the success of the program. ACS NSQIP focuses on effective system change to improve patient care through performance improvement platform creation, M & M discussions, presentations to best practice groups and service chiefs, as well as many other initiatives.

As the Surgeon Champion, the answer to all questions should be: “because it’s to the patient’s advantage.” A Surgeon Champion should ultimately be obligated to lifelong learning and teaching of themselves, the patients and others.