Tip of the Month – April, 2011
Orthopaedic Vendor Fairs

"Surgeon's Diary"

Dr. Peter Trafton, OTA Past President (Presidential Term: 1993 – 1994)

Title: Surgeon's Diary
Howard Rosen, the legendary AO surgical educator and mentor, told me about this years ago. To the extent that I've followed his suggestion, it has proven well worth the invested time and effort.

A surgeon can learn a lot from a single operation. Reviewing, analyzing, and, yes, remembering the lessons are all improved by recording them in a private diary. The process focuses us on performance, and upon retaining what we've learned. Howard stressed that such a diary allows the surgeon to record, for personal use and review, observations that might not appear in the patient's medical record: things less satisfactory than planned, surprise discoveries, problems encountered, attempted solutions, how well they worked – or didn't. **The reduction** or fixation that was accepted, but led later to second thoughts; perhaps regrets. **The solution** not conceived of until the operation was finished. **The trick** that jumped into your mind, or maybe was suggested by your resident or scrub tech, and turned out to be the magic answer. **The instrument** that worked so well, or perhaps failed to. **The equipment not requested**, and so on.

Such details are most vivid soon after an operation, or as the surgeon mentally replays a difficult procedure, trying to figure out how problems could have been anticipated, and/or surmounted. Howard Rosen, like all good surgeons, believed in self-improvement. He understood and communicated the value of incorporating effective improvement efforts into his daily work and life.

Times have changed since Howard told us about the surgeon's diary. Now we must respect Protected Health Information, according to HIPAA privacy and security rules. My electronic diary must comply – but digital technology simplifies legible recording, retrieval of information, and inclusion of images. These all contribute to our improving surgical knowledge & skills.