Central service professionals who were encouraged by Healthcare Purchasing News’ 2003 salary survey results now have an even greater reason to be optimistic. That’s because respondents of the exclusive 2004 survey of CS personnel revealed that the average salary now exceeds $45,000 – up more than $4,500 from last year’s total. What’s more, 85.5% reported a pay raise in 2004, representing a slight increase over the 2003 figure (80%).

One hundred and twenty-six CS employees of varying titles responded to the email survey. CS managers and supervisors comprised the majority of respondents, representing 35.5% and 25%, respectively. CS technicians/coordinators accounted for 23.6% of respondents, with CS directors following at 13.3%. Rounding out the remaining 2.6% were those with “other” CS titles, including surgery instrument technician and testing section leader.

Overall, the survey provided a snapshot of today’s typical – and very busy — CS professional. Not unlike years past, CS employees are predominantly female (68.4%), well educated (half of those polled have earned at least some form of college degree), and certified by either the International Association of Healthcare Central Service Materiel Management (31%) or the Certification Board for Sterile Processing & Distribution Inc. (21.8%), formerly the National Institute for the Certification of Healthcare Sterile Processing and Distribution. The average CS professional also works in a 300-bed, not-for-profit, standalone hospital (73.7%) in an urban setting (48.7%), reports to either the director of materials management (34.7%) or the operating room director (29.3%), and has a long tenure (42.1% have worked in CS at least 20 years and 34.2% have been a CS employee between ten and 19 years).

They also are loyal to their hospitals. Approximately 29% of those polled indicated they have worked at their current facilities at least 20 years – a figure that may not come as a surprise given that the majority of respondents were comprised of CS managers and supervisors. Still, 14.5% revealed they have worked in CS at their current facility between ten and 14 years.

One Idaho-based material management director and former CS supervisor wasn’t surprised by those findings. “More people are making CS a career choice these days,” said Laurie Davis of Kootenai Medical Center, Coeur D’Alene, ID, a 25-year veteran of CS herself. “CS professionals have the opportunity for good pay and there’s room for growth. It’s no longer being considered ‘just a job.'”

Many hats, more pay
CS workers come from many different professional backgrounds and possess a broad range of skills—a fact that seems to be spurring an increase in responsibility, respect and pay.

Roughly 15% of respondents are registered nurses, 16.9% have been trained in infection control and 10% have LVN/LPN backgrounds. Not surprisingly, nearly one-third (29.9%) of respondents have experience in hospital purchasing, and nearly 19.5% are experienced hospital storeroom managers. A small percentage of respondents also have laboratory technician and pharmacy backgrounds (5.2% and 2.6%, respectively).

As could be expected, CS professionals in managerial roles are reaping the greatest financial rewards. CS managers earn the most with 2004 salaries totaling $53,125 – up from the 2003 figure of $43,714. CS directors, who oversee many functions, including decontamination (93.3%); sterile processing (92%); medical equipment cleaning/disinfection (81.3%); OR supply distribution (74.7%); nursing floor supply distribution (62.7%); storeroom (26.7%) and others (including purchasing, central transport, laundry/linen service and building

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Salary by Region

Southeast $48,333
Central $47,727
Mountain $41,944
Northeast $45,577
Pacific $39,444

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maintenance) – earn the second highest salaries ($52,000), followed by CS supervisors at $40,694. CS technicians are still the lowest paid, but they appear to be making headway. The average salary for 2004 topped $35,100, representing a significant leap over the $24,139 salary for 2003. Despite the across-the-board pay increases, it appears that hospital and departmental budgetary constraints are limiting any additional financial compensation. Roughly 70% of respondents aren’t expecting a bonus this year, and nearly one-third (28.1%) who are anticipating a raise are expecting only a 3-3.99% increase.

While some may question the overall pay hikes, particularly figures related to technicians, others weren’t so surprised. “These figures don’t seem off the mark,” said Joyce Ifill, assistant professor for surgical technology and certified processing technology, and director for the central processing program at Massachusetts Bay Community College in Framingham. “With skill and knowledge comes more pay and recognition. Many CS employees are becoming involved in continuing education and are becoming certified.” Indeed. The 2004 survey revealed that those with Bachelor and post-graduate degrees earn the most, both with an annual salary at or just slightly below $59,000. Those with Associate degrees earn roughly $39,000. While the survey also revealed that salaries for those with only high school degrees now top $41,000, it’s important to point out that many of these individuals have long tenures and are now in managerial or supervisory positions.

Regardless of CS professionals’ titles, it appears that continuing education remains a priority. Today, the average CS employee participates in 8.93 continuing education classes per year – a slight, yet steady increase over the 2002 and 2003 survey averages of 7.5 and 8.52, respectively.

“Knowledge is power and the bar is definitely being raised for this profession,” said Sybil Williams, CS manager for Houston’s Lyndon B. Johnson General Hospital. Williams, who also serves as IAHCSMM’s president, added that a growing number of individuals with college degrees are entering the CS profession, which is further validating the CS discipline.

“Education is becoming increasingly important to hospitals,” she continued, “and CS is definitely rising to the occasion.”

Mapping out differences

Geographical location and facility demographics also factor into the pay scale of today’s CS professionals. Those who work in the Southeast earn the most, with average salaries reaching approximately $48,333. Interestingly, the survey showed that those in Central states (representing 29.3% of respondents) earn the second highest salaries ($47,727), followed by those in the Northeast ($45,577), Mountain region ($41,944) and Pacific ($39,444).

As can be expected, CS professionals who work in larger facilities tend to earn more.

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Those in hospitals with more than 1,000 beds earn an average of $51,875, followed closely by those who work in facilities with 400-499 beds ($51,153). That’s not to say that facilities with fewer beds don’t offer competitive pay, however. Those working in hospitals with 200-299 beds earn an average of $49,166 and the average salary for respondents in facilities with as few as 40-99 beds tops $40,600.

Regardless of their location and demographics, it seems most CS professionals enjoy some job security. Nearly half (48.7%) of respondents indicated they are somewhat secure and 47.4% reported they are very secure in their positions.

David Narance, who heads the sterile reprocessing department at MedCentral Health System in Mansfield, OH, believes the increasing functions and responsibilities of CS – coupled with a greater overall emphasis on quality of care across the board – is lending itself to greater job security.

“It seems that hospitals are recognizing the value that CS provides and are appreciating the important role we play in quality patient care,” he said. That’s certainly the case at MedCentral where every new nurse manager is required to tour the CS department to learn more about the CS function and those who are behind it.

“We in CS have a story to tell and it seems that more people are willing to listen.” HPN