Implementation of the AJCC 8th Edition Cancer Staging System

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The latest edition of the AJCC Cancer Staging Manual, the 8th Edition, will be published by Springer on October 31, 2016 and will replace the 7th Edition for use in clinical care effective January 1, 2017. The 8th Edition Cancer Staging System is the culmination of the work of over 400 volunteers, representing all members of the multidisciplinary cancer care team from across the world.

Patient Care

The 8th Edition AJCC Cancer Staging System will be used for cancer cases diagnosed January 1, 2017 or later. As is expected with any significant update to tumor staging, there will be a several month transition period in which other professional and stakeholder organizations such as College of American Pathologists (CAP) and the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN), will begin to incorporate changes into their clinical practice guidelines. During this transition process, pathology reports may still contain material based on the 7th Edition. Up-to-date staging by providers is critical for optimal patient management and the 8th Edition AJCC Cancer Staging Manual will be accessible and should be used at multidisciplinary conferences, and individual practices, starting in January. Tumor registrars, chairs of multidisciplinary conferences and providers should be vigilant for any reports or other data based on the previous edition during the transition period.

Data Collection

The AJCC is dependent on data collected by the National Cancer Database (NCDB), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Cancer Institute – Surveillance Epidemiology, and End Results Program (NCI-SEER), and the Canadian registries to implement the changes in the 8th Edition beginning in January 2017. The AJCC is well aware of the challenges this will present for cancer surveillance and clinical data collection registrars. It is recognized that some data inaccuracies may result, as experience has demonstrated in previous AJCC edition transitions. The AJCC, the CAP and all parties involved are committed to minimizing this possibility. Rapid software modifications are encouraged and should serve to reduce this possible exposure.

The surveillance standard setters, professional organizations and governmental agencies have all been communicating, and continue to do so, to synchronize efforts.
Accreditation/Guidelines

The AJCC recognizes that accreditation is a critical component of quality patient care. The Commission on Cancer (CoC) and the CAP coordinate their accreditation standards to support each other. However, the AJCC recognizes that there may be a window in 2017 where the updated CAP Cancer Protocols are still under development and will not have been implemented for clinical care or accreditation purposes.

The CAP is making every effort to accelerate the revision of its protocols. This will be facilitated by prioritization of the protocols for the most prevalent cancers in 2016, followed by the revisions to the remaining protocols in the first quarter of 2017. For CAP accreditation, laboratories will NOT be surveyed for patient reports using the AJCC 8th Edition until 8 months after the official release of the specific revised CAP Cancer Protocols. The AJCC encourages laboratories and vendors utilizing the CAP Cancer Protocol and electronic Cancer Checklist (eCC) content to plan for expedient implementation for their users once the CAP content is released.

CoC Surveys performed in 2017 will not be affected by the 8th edition change because surveyors will review pathology reports generated during 2014, 2015, and 2016. CoC Surveys performed in 2018 and beyond will continue to review cancer pathology reports for Standard 2.1 based on the usual 8 month window for implementation of CAP Cancer Protocol required data elements.

The NCCN is also on a tight timeline for updating and publishing their guidelines. The AJCC and NCCN are collaborating on access to the 8th Edition content to accelerate this process.

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