Lesson 5
Terminology – Difference Between Physician and Registrar

Donna M. Gress, RHIT, CTR
Terminology Differences

• Writing style of AJCC manual
  – Conversational
  – Journal or book style
  – Not a legal document where words are absolutely precise
  – General guidelines
  – Most common scenarios
  – Not always strict rules
  – Allow for variability seen in medical practice

• Writing style of registry manuals
  – Attribute specific meaning to words
  – Strict rules
  – Need for consistency in data collection
  – Parse words for definitive meaning
  – Definitions constructed by registry community
  – Not necessarily consistent with dictionary definitions
No Ambiguous Terminology for AJCC

- Cannot use registry ambiguous terminology lists from
  - FORDS
  - SEER manuals
  - Collaborative Stage
  - Summary Stage
  - Out of date manuals, standards
    - Cancer Program Manual 1980’s
    - Cancer Program Standards 1990’s, early 2000
    - Data Acquisition Manual (DAM)
    - Registry Operations and Data Standards (ROADS)
  - Local, state, regional, and national documentation
  - Personal memory of past use
Examples: Why NOT to Use

• Example of term definitions
  – 1996 Volume I: Cancer Program Standards defined terms
    • Must, shall, required: mandatory and acceptable
    • Should: commonly accepted, allow effective alternatives
    • May: acceptable alternative but not preferred

• If physician uses “may”
  – Do not apply definition from your memory of other manuals

• Use common sense or dictionary definition for term
  – Permission requested or granted
  – Usual or typical interpretation of the word

• If employer says “you may have the day off”
  – You should not take the day off, it is not preferred?
  – You will take the day off
Ambiguous Terms – A Secret Club

• Secret handshake that only registrars know

• No-one can join our exclusive secret club
  – Isolates registrars from medical world
  – Isolates registrars from reality

• Not in keeping with
  – Current medical practice
  – Standard dictionary definitions
  – General usage of these terms
  – Common phrasing by physicians

• Jeopardizes communication with physicians
  – Physicians are not aware of these definitions
  – Must be used by every physician worldwide for accuracy
  – Unrealistic to teach these arbitrary definitions to physicians
Ambiguous Terms Threaten Registrars

• Use of ambiguous terminology
  – Computer could identify ambiguous terminology
  – Automated data collection based on terminology
  – Replace registrar jobs
  – Threaten registrars place in the cancer team

• Value of registrars is their ability to
  – Interpret terminology
  – Understand the context
  – Decipher the meaning in light of all information
  – Perform critical thinking

• Registrars are capable – they do not need this crutch

• Using the terms can lead to wrong conclusions
Intent vs. Terminology

• Cannot use one word or one report in isolation
  – Assess intent, interpretation, perception
  – Do not over analyze or parse word choices

• Need to evaluate the whole picture
  – Reports list all abnormal findings, not just cancer involvement
  – Understand other medical causes for abnormalities
  – Look for further testing ordered to investigate

• Review
  – Consults
  – Guidelines from NCCN, ASCO, others
  – Treatment plans, which can infer stage

• Rely on physician’s medical judgment
Pragmatism

• Not practical for worldwide medical community to agree on
  – Definitions of imprecise words
  – Usage of descriptions for equivocal findings
  – Use consist word style, not allowing variation by
    • Region of the country or world
    • Medical training
    • Personal style

• Registrars are capable of
  – Understanding the intent
  – Analyzing the information
  – Applying critical thinking
  – Deducing the physician’s conclusions
  – Asking questions of the physician when there is doubt
AJCC Terminology

• Interpretation of 7th edition writing style
  – Describes usual or common case scenario
  – Describes guidelines and best practice
  – Allows for variation seen in medical practice
  – Do not apply registry definitions

• Ambiguous terminology lists are not valid or necessary
  – CANNOT use for AJCC staging
Thank you

Donna M. Gress, RHIT, CTR
AJCC Technical Specialist

AJCC
American Joint Committee on Cancer
Validating science. Improving patient care.

633 N. Saint Clair, Chicago, IL 6011-3211
cancerstaging.org

No materials in this presentation may be repurposed without the express written permission of the American Joint Committee on Cancer. Permission requests may be submitted at CancerStaging.net