

EDITORIAL



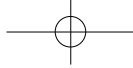
New Challenges for Learned Societies Working as Experts: the Experience of the French Society for ORL

Learned societies including the French Society for ORL and Head and Neck Surgery (SFORL) are increasingly asked to put their expertise at the service of oversight authorities, administrative agencies, and partners. The explosive growth of the demand for expert opinion in all the fields of our specialty is fed by the need to develop clinical practice guidelines for determining when diagnostic interventions, pharmacotherapies, and surgical treatments are appropriate. At the SFORL, the Expert Evaluation Committee handles and organizes all expert evaluation tasks. Partial SFORL board elections held in 2004 broadened the committee to reflect the full spectrum of otorhinolaryngological subspecialties, in both office and hospital practice.

The committee has several tasks. First, it organizes the development by the SFORL of clinical practice guidelines and regulatory medical references (one or two each year) for the High Health Authority (at its request or at the suggestion of the SFORL), the French Agency for Healthcare Product Safety (AFSSAPS), and learned societies in other specialties. Second, the committee organizes the work commissioned by oversight authorities. Finally, the committee makes a major contribution to ensuring that physician fees match the services rendered by working with the High Health Authority on developing fee scales for new procedures, as well as with the public health insurance system on requests for fee scale changes; (the High Health Authority was created over a year ago as a coalescence of the former National Agency for Healthcare Accreditation and Evaluation [ANAES], the Transparency Commission [former DGS], and the Commission for Evaluating Healthcare Products and Reimbursements (former AFSSAPS)).

Although the committee organizes expert assessments, to which its members make a strong contribution, many SFORL members have contributed also, some on several occasions. Space restrictions do not allow me to name them all, but they deserve our warmest thanks. Participation in a group that is developing recommendations or conducting an evaluation for the AFSSAPS, for instance, requires long hours of work. Participation in these groups will add credit points to the physician's Professional Practices Evaluation.

Importantly, 2006 has witnessed a strong increase in the demand for practice guidelines in our specialty. These guidelines will serve as a basis for evaluating professional practices. The High Health Authority requests that learned societies develop short recommendations appropriate for everyday clinical practice, chiefly for common disorders (as a first step). The former ANAES used a cumbersome methodology to



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develop recommendations. The High Health Authority is introducing a far simpler guideline-drafting procedure, which is explained in an instruction manual that will be published shortly. With the new procedure, the guidelines will be developed based on recommendations or consensus conferences in France or elsewhere, without repeating the cumbersome methodological process and extensive literature reviews. A more compact task force, suggested by the learned societies, will be asked to draft each guideline, with a self-evaluation grid at the end.

Two guidelines have been developed using the new procedure in the field of ORL, one on tonsillectomy and the other on adenoidectomy (available on the High Health Authority site at <http://www.anaes.fr>, publications link). Developing guidelines for our specialty is a priority for the near future, since the Professional Practices Evaluation regulation will require that otorhinolaryngologists evaluate their work using tools that are suited to everyday clinical practice.

In the course of the next year, SFORL members will be surveyed by the SFORL or national organizations (e.g., the physician's union) about suggested guidelines relevant to their everyday practice. They will also be invited to participate in the development of these indispensable tools.

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