



American  
Association of  
Neurological  
Surgeons



Congress of  
Neurological  
Surgeons

## Joint Guidelines Review Committee Governance

### **Background**

The Joint Guidelines Review Committee (JGRC) is a standing subcommittee of the Washington Committee of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS). The JGRC's primary charge is to evaluate clinical practice guidelines of potential relevance to neurosurgical practice. Membership consists of physicians and related personnel with an interest and/or expertise in evidence-based medicine and clinical practice guidelines. Members are appointed by the Washington Committee, with the approval of the AANS and the CNS presidents. Potential appointees are solicited from the various joint subspecialty sections of the AANS/CNS, the Council of State Neurosurgical Societies (CSNS), AANS Young Neurosurgeons Committee (YNC) and others. Members must undergo an introductory training session in evidence-based medicine techniques and the evaluation of clinical practice guidelines or provide evidence of equivalent training.

### **Intent and Role of the JGRC**

Although the primary charge of the JGRC is the evaluation of clinical practice guidelines of potential relevance to neurosurgical practice, this process includes many specific and related activities, including:

- Serving as subject matter and methodology experts who will be responsible for reviewing the AANS/CNS subspecialty section work products and external evidence-based guidelines, and recommending approval or revisions prior to approval by the parent organizations (AANS Board of Directors and the CNS Executive Committee).
- Serving to facilitate communication regarding guidelines topics to and among the subspecialty section's representatives to the JGRC.
- Providing representatives to work with other health professional organizations that are producing multidisciplinary clinical guidelines in areas related to neurosurgical practice, as well as reviewing these efforts for potential AANS/CNS endorsement.
- Serving as a resource for the Washington Office and AANS/CNS leadership, regarding evidence-based clinical practice guidelines.

### **Composition of the JGC**

- The leadership of the JGRC will consist of a past Chair, Chair and three (3) vice-chairs, appointed by the Chair of the Washington Committee and ratified by the leadership of the AANS and the CNS. Each will serve a two-year term, and the vice-chairs may sequentially ascend upwards to the position of Chair. The committee is comprised of representatives nominated by the leadership of each of the Joint Sections, the CSNS, the YNC, and the AANS/CNS Coding and Reimbursement Committee. Additional liaisons will be appointed from the CNS guidelines committee and other specialty organizations as needed. Each

section/entity is allotted 1-9 appointees based on the size of their membership and guideline productivity. Each term is three years in length and may be renewed at the direction of the nominating entity.

### **Guideline Evaluation Process**

- The role of the JGRC is to review internally and externally developed *evidence-based clinical practice guidelines*. The JGRC will assist in funneling requests for review of documents that do not meet the threshold for an evidence-based clinical practice guideline to the appropriate Joint Section leaders for consideration. Such documents might include consensus statements, technical assessments, appropriateness criteria, white papers, and other non-evidence-based statements. All such documents should be presented to the JGRC to determine the appropriate disposition and will be reviewed in a timely fashion as current priorities and workflow allow.
- The JGRC reserves the right to recommend to the AANS/CNS that documents deemed to have minimal relevance, potential impact, or importance to the field of neurosurgery be declined for review.
- Any sponsoring organization that submits an evidence-based guideline, consensus statement, technical assessment, appropriate use criteria, white paper, or any other non-evidence-based statement for JGRC review must disclose the funding source for the development of the document in question. Documents funded or sponsored — in whole or in part — by an AANS or CNS committee or subspecialty section(s) will still be subject to the review process described below and such support in no way guarantees AANS and CNS endorsement. Funding or other support provided by AANS and CNS committees and subspecialty sections for guideline projects is separate and distinct from any endorsement decision that the JGRC and the AANS and CNS may make on the final document.
- There are two classes of JGRC guideline evaluation — Request for Approval/Endorsement and Request for Review (detailed below).
- A typical JGRC review will be performed by a subcommittee of JGRC members headed by a member of the JGRC leadership acting as the lead reviewer. The size and make-up of the subcommittee will vary according to the length and complexity of the guideline being reviewed. Ideally, at least one-third of the subcommittee will consist of non-specialty specific methodological experts. Each subcommittee member will fill out a guideline-specific conflict of interest (COI) form, which will be examined by the lead reviewer and handled as per the JGRC COI Policy.
- The JGRC has not endorsed a specific timeline for guideline submission and reviews but aims for efficiency. The JGRC encourages guideline developers to keep guidelines as focused and practical as possible. Guideline developers should also keep the JGRC well-informed throughout the process by continually submitting component materials to the JGRC as they become available, rather than simply submitting the final product. Similarly, the JGRC should make itself available for feedback at all stages of the process.
- Upon each level of review, the JGRC should decide whether the developers need to respond to substantive comments or simply make administrative edits (e.g., typos, etc.).
- The JGRC meets during the AANS and the CNS national meetings and throughout the year via conference call, as needed.

- All committee members are required to participate in an intensive educational immersion session in evidence-based medicine principles, theory and methodology, practical guidelines construction, and evaluation and critique techniques, or provide evidence of equivalent prior training.
- There is no fee for JGRC evaluation.

### ***Classes of Evaluation***

#### **1. Request for Approval/Endorsement**

- a. The JGRC will review the sponsor's material and provide written feedback regarding methodology, content, recommendations and conclusions. This evaluation will result in one of five overall assessments (see below). The written feedback should clearly specify the points of major concern, if present, which require revision or response for subsequent approval.
- b. If approval/endorsement is solicited by the sponsor and revisions are requested by the JGRC, a resubmission of the document will be required. This resubmission will be reviewed to ensure that major points of concern have been addressed, either through revision or by a response that clarifies the point to the committee's satisfaction.
- c. If not accepted for approval/endorsement, the sponsor may ask for an evaluation to be changed to a Request for Review.

#### **2. Request for Review**

- a. The JGRC will review the sponsor's material and provide written feedback regarding methodology, content, recommendations and conclusions.
- b. Documents submitted for review do not require a specific written response to JGRC evaluation. However, such documents will not be considered for later endorsement.
- c. When requesting a review, the sponsoring organization must agree in writing to the inclusion of the following statement (or similar) in the final guidelines document:
 

“Review of this guidelines document by the Joint Guidelines Review Committee (JGRC) of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) and the Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS) does not constitute an endorsement or approval of this document, its content or conclusions by the JGRC, the AANS or the CNS, or any of its members.”
- d. The JGRC will require a copy of the final guideline document for review prior to publication.

### ***Classes of Assessment***

Following the review, the AANS and the CNS will utilize one of five classes for assessing document. These classes of assessment apply not just to evidenced-based guidelines reviewed by the JGRC, but also to other guidelines, consensus statements, technical assessments, appropriate use criteria,

white papers, or any other non-evidence-based statements reviewed by the AANS, the CNS, JGRC and/or AANS/CNS subspecialty sections.

1. No Concerns, Recommend Approval/Endorsement: No revisions necessary.
2. Minor Concerns, Reconsideration Not Required: Recommend approval/endorsement with a request for minor, non-substantive revisions that do not require JGRC review.
3. Minor Concerns, Reconsideration Required: Reconsider for approval/endorsement after minor revisions requiring review by JGRC officers only.
4. Major Concerns, Reconsideration Required: Reconsider for approval/endorsement after major revisions requiring review by full review subcommittee.
5. Unable to Evaluate: Current methodology or structure precludes assessment by JGRC as an evidence-based medicine clinical practice guideline.

### **Endorsement Wording**

The following language should be used when communicating with the sponsoring organization:

1. Section Review (not approved)  

This document was reviewed, but not endorsed by the American Association of Neurological Surgeons/Congress of Neurological Surgeons [*insert joint section name*].
2. JGRC Review (not approved)  

This document was reviewed, but not endorsed by the American Association of Neurological Surgeons and Congress of Neurological Surgeons.
3. Section Affirmation (after parent organization approval)  

The American Association of Neurological Surgeons/Congress of Neurological Surgeons [*insert joint section name*] affirms the educational benefit of this document.
4. JGRC Full Endorsement (full agreement, no major areas of disagreement)  

Reviewed for evidence-based integrity and endorsed by the American Association of Neurological Surgeons and Congress of Neurological Surgeons.
5. JGRC Partial Endorsement (substantial agreement, but still some significant areas of disagreement or document methodology not sufficiently rigorous to support true EBM endorsement)  

The American Association of Neurological Surgeons and Congress of Neurological Surgeons affirm the educational benefit of this document.

### **Follow-up with Sponsoring Organization**

The JGRC will follow-up with the sponsoring organization to ensure compliance with its endorsement policy. Additionally, in communicating with the sponsoring organization, it should be made clear that any language and/or references to the AANS and the CNS by name (e.g., financial

disclosures/acknowledgments, endorsement, etc.) shall be submitted for approval by the two parent organizations before permission for publication is given.

### **JGRC Member Expectations**

- Before becoming a member, all JGRC appointees must complete the Agreement to Comply with the AANS/CNS JGRC Conflict of Interest and Governance Policy before beginning work with the JGRC.
- Before becoming a member, all JGRC appointees are required to participate in an intensive educational immersion session in evidence-based medicine principles, theory and methodology, practical guidelines construction, and evaluation and critique techniques, or provide evidence of equivalent prior training. This training must be documented before participation in review activities for the JGRC.
- JGRC members are responsible for adhering to the tenets of the JGRC governance document
- The primary responsibility and charge of JGRC members is to participate as methodology experts, and when appropriate, content experts on evidence-based guideline review subcommittees headed by a member of the JGRC leadership. JGRC members are expected to actively volunteer to serve on such subcommittees. Requests for volunteers for guideline review subcommittees will be sent intermittently via email as the need arises.
- JGRC members participating in a guideline review subcommittee must complete a guideline-specific COI form, which will be reviewed by the subcommittee lead reviewer and handled per the JGRC COI policy. If additional COI develop during the guideline review, these should be communicated to the lead reviewer as soon as possible.
- JGRC members are responsible for working collaboratively with staff and consultants, adhering to the Guideline Evaluation Process and making every reasonable effort to meet all set timelines, participate in conference calls and attend all meetings.
- While participating in a guideline review, the JGRC member should:
  - Make every effort to ensure completion of Guideline review throughout all phases of review and the decision about endorsement within the timeframe assigned; and
  - Make known upon first review any issue or factor that if unresolved would cause the individual reviewing not to endorse the document or have a dissenting opinion against a majority decision.
- JGRC members should be aware that the guideline review process may exceed the length of their JGRC term. In this case, the JGRC member is still expected to adhere to all expectations while finishing out the review of the guideline.

### **Role of the JGRC Administrator**

The JGRC Administrator will support the activities of the JGRC, performing the following functions:

- Coordinating practice guidelines projects as directed by the JGRC leadership, including supporting and assisting in the guideline and consensus/technical statement review and approval process as outlined above and additionally below:
  - For evidence-based guideline as determined by the JGRC leadership, refer to JGRC for review/approval as requested.

- For non-evidence-based documents as determined by the JGRC leadership, including consensus statements, technical assessments, appropriate use criteria, white papers, etc., refer to the appropriate section(s).
  - If it is a high-value document, as identified by the JGRC, Joint Section, or the AANS or the CNS leadership, the review by the relevant Joint Section(s) should be performed within a time frame designated by the section(s) and/or AANS and CNS leadership. If the deadline is not met, the JGRC administrator will notify AANS and CNS leadership to ensure a timely response.
  - Other documents will be referred to the relevant Joint Section(s) to review as they deem appropriate, and will be funneled back through the JGRC coordinator for AANS and CNS action.
- Preparing and disseminating agendas, minutes and other meeting materials required by the JGRC and its review panels or workgroups.
- Coordinating conference calls required by the JGRC and its review panels or workgroups, employing web-based collaborative technology (e.g., WebEx, SharePoint, etc.) when appropriate.
- Attending JGRC in-person meetings, conference calls and webinars, as required.
- Maintaining the JGRC roster and coordinating appointments to the JGRC, including communicating with the subspecialty sections and other neurosurgical committees or organizations that have representation on the JGRC. Maintenance of the JGRC roster includes tracking JGRC new appointees compliance with the JGRC training requirement, and with guideline-specific conflict of interest disclosure for assigned JGRC subcommittee members.
- Coordinating communications between the JGRC and Joint Sections, Washington Committee, AANS and CNS leadership, and other appropriate neurosurgical committees or organizations.
- Preparing periodic JGRC reports/updates for the Washington Committee, AANS Board of Directors, and CNS Executive Committee.
- Communicating with guidelines staff at other organizations to track ongoing projects, identify neurosurgical volunteers to serve on writing committees, and to ensure that the AANS and the CNS are consulted at an early state on projects relevant to neurosurgery.

## **Appendices**

- AANS/CNS Joint Guidelines Review Committee Conflict of Interest Policy
- AANS/CNS Joint Guidelines Review Committee Conflict of Interest Statement and Forms