The Society of Thoracic Surgeons Esophageal Cancer Guideline Series

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This issue of The Annals introduces the first of a series of clinical guidelines for esophageal cancer. These guidelines are the end-product of several years of effort by a taskforce drawn from The Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS) Workforces on Evidence Based Surgery and General Thoracic Surgery. For each guideline, a committee of expert thoracic surgeons within the field of esophageal cancer, employing a rigorous and exhaustive search methodology, produced a series of clinical recommendations for the diagnosis, staging, and treatment of esophageal malignancy. Specific attention was devoted to clinical issues where controversy exists. Each paper was then reviewed by the entire taskforce and each recommendation was graded based on the strength of the available evidence and relative benefit to patients. Finally, each guideline was subjected to the standard STS approval process for evidenced-based guidelines, including a time period for review and public comment by STS membership. Approval of the document by The Society of Thoracic Surgeons Executive Committee confers endorsement by STS, before final acceptance for publication.

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With the increasing incidence of esophageal cancer around the world, this disease has become even more important in the typical practice of the thoracic surgeon. This is a first attempt on the part of the thoracic surgical community to use evidence-based practices to guide the evaluation of these patients, and sets a precedent for the surgeon to play a pivotal role in the assessment and management of patients with this dread disease. It is generally accepted that a multidisciplinary approach by all managing physicians early on in the care of these patients may lead to better diagnostic and staging evaluation, as well as optimization of combined modality therapy. This approach, although time consuming, is better in that all the treating physicians participate in determining the best care for each patient. It is critical that thoracic surgeons remain conversant in the modern technological advances, the newest treatment modalities, and the latest published evidence regarding esophageal malignancy to stay relevant in the multidisciplinary environment.

The first guideline, which appears in this issue of The Annals, discusses the diagnosis and staging of esophageal cancer [1]. Future guidelines will review the evaluation and treatment of the continuum of Barrett’s esophagus to early-stage esophageal cancer, the role of multimodality therapy for esophageal malignancy, and the choice of esophageal resection techniques. If successful, these guidelines will further enable thoracic surgeons to provide evidenced-based care for their patients and to play a prominent role in the management of this difficult disease.

Reference