

## **Physician recorded TNM staging**

**WHAT TO DO?** Is your facility requesting that TNM stage must be recorded as stated by the physician whether it is correct or not? In a presentation by Dr. David Winchester, Director of the Commission on Cancer, at an NCRA Annual Conference he referenced this issue. Here are excerpts from the presentation that define how this situation should be handled:

### **When documenting clinical and pathologic stage in registry database:**

- Record physician assigned stage
- If physician stage not accurate, record registrar assigned stage in database
- If no physician stage in medical record, registrar assigns stage in database
- Registrar NEVER changes stage in medical record
- If physician stage seems incorrect – Verify with physician as they may have additional information
- Discuss with registry physician advisor or other appropriate physician
- Refer identified issues to Cancer Committee for quality improvement
- Address documentation issues and Education on staging rules
- Medical Record is a legal document; Authoritative, legal source of information regarding patient; Registrars do not have legal authority to document in medical record
- Registrars cannot enter any information, including check boxes on staging form
- Registrars cannot fill out a staging form – even if the physician signs it; Legally discoverable, must be produced in response to subpoena
- Hospital Registry Database is a work product of the registrar
- Registrar coded their interpretation of medical record (abstract) in the registry database; legally considered a “work product”; not legally discoverable, cannot be requested in a subpoena

Source: David P. Winchester, MD, FACS, FAR (Hon)

National Program of Cancer Registries