ESTRO

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EUROPEAN SOCIETY FOR RADIOTHERAPY & ONCOLOGY

ACROP PROCEDURES POLICY

DOCUMENT HISTORY
Approved 28 February 2020

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This ACROP procedures policy applies to the Advisory Committee on Radiation Oncology Practice (ACROP) of ESTRO. The policy is only in English.

1. OBJECTIVES OF THE ACROP PROCEDURES POLICY

1.1. Definition of ACROP

ACROP was formed in December 2012, with the aim to advise the ESTRO Board and respective ESTRO councils on the following key areas:

- *The development and prioritisation of guidelines in the field of radiation oncology. At present focus has been placed on the development of clinical and technical guidelines;*
- *Multidisciplinary guidelines involving other professional oncology societies both within Europe (e.g. ECCO) and internationally (e.g. ASTRO, UICC);*
- *Emerging and draft legislation and / or advisory documentation from the EU that may impact on European radiation oncology;*
- *Initiatives within the EU that may be important to the strategic development of European radiation oncology;*
- *Strategic assessment of any other documents, guidelines and miscellaneous information that may impact on clinical service development within the discipline of Radiation Oncology.*

In order to achieve an optimal integration of ACROP into other relevant ESTRO committees and ensure proper exchange of information, ACROP will automatically integrate at least one member of each discipline committee plus one member from the Educational Council and the Young task force into its body.

1.2. Definition of the policy

This policy sets the standard operating procedures for the development of ESTRO guidelines and guidelines endorsed by ESTRO.
It defines the process of guideline development from the commencement of a new guideline, prioritisation of guideline initiatives, financial support, benchmarking, reviewing and proofreading, to the publication of a guideline.
The policy also defines ESTRO's involvement in multidisciplinary guidelines issued by other consortia.

2. PROCEDURES FOR GUIDELINES ISSUED BY ESTRO

2.1. Minimal consensus – procedures

2.1.1. Proposals for new guidelines

Proposals may be received from both ESTRO committees and individual ESTRO experts. ACROP, in close co-operation with the ESTRO councils, will propose areas of high importance for development of guidelines and will actively foster the development of guidelines in focus areas highlighted within the ESTRO vision document.

An initial proposal should contain information regarding the need, rationale and content of the proposed guideline. Furthermore, information regarding the writing committee, a suitable reviewing committee and timelines for defined deliverables should be provided. ACROP will review the composition of the writing and the review committee and will make additional suggestions if deemed necessary. The group proposing the guideline should provide information regarding parallel or overlapping activities from other scientific societies or other boards to the extent they are aware. Similarly, ACROP is responsible for checking if other similar activities are taking place.

All proposals will be collected by ACROP and discussed during the regular ACROP meetings. Decisions will be made in close collaboration with other ESTRO relevant committees and when appropriate with other societies. Liaison people with other key societies should be identified and regular informal exchange should take place.

All key aspects of a guideline proposal will be checked by ACROP, based on the present policy, summarised in the ACROP check list. In case of a positive decision, the relevant ESTRO Scientific Council and editors of the journal will be informed. At this stage, the editor of the journal will be informed about the proposed reviewing committee, in order to approve it or suggest some changes.

2.1.2. Writing of guidelines

Guidelines will be prepared by a guideline preparation committee (writing committee) reflecting the whole range of scientific and clinical expertise needed. When appropriate, the writing committee should reflect the diversity of possible approaches throughout Europe and internationally. Furthermore, it is mandatory that all members of the writing committee have a recognised expertise in their field (documented by relevant publications, participation in relevant study groups, clinical trial groups other scientific panels or similar activities). The number of participants is related to the complexity of the individual guideline. No hard recommendations will be made.

The writing committee will appoint one of its members as chair. The writing committee is responsible for the preparation of the guideline and for defining the deliverables and timeline.

During preparation the writing committee needs to take into account that a guideline is different from an in-depth review article. Whereas a review article provides a detailed and concise overview regarding the scientific background of any given issue, a guideline defines the hands-on approach. The scientific background has to be taken into account as the foundation of any recommendation. However, for a wide range of reasons, particularly in daily routine, a lack of hard evidence will force any writing committee to provide pragmatic "best suggestions". Of special importance is the fact the guideline will provide pragmatic suggestion for a certain "how to do something" based on a balanced appreciation of the scientific framework, whereas a review will put much more focus on the detailed analysis of the available scientific data.

In this regard a guideline should not have more than 3-5 printed pages in the journal, and in any case not exceeding the maximum of 6 printed pages as per a full article, presenting the rationale, the key guideline content and documentation of limitations and shortcomings. All other data may be included as an online supplement outside of the guideline text.

2.2. Minimal consensus – content

2.2.1. Rationale

Every guideline provides the necessary information regarding the underlying rationale for the guideline as well as the scientific background.

For target volume guidelines (TV-guidelines) the definition of a rationale is not mandatory. It should be replaced by an exact definition of which areas and clinical stages that the guideline is addressing.

2.2.2. Methodology

The methodology for the selection of data, inclusion or exclusion of publications as well as the research strategy should be indicated adequately.
The writing committee should adhere as much as possible to standard terminology, and if necessary, include a legend, where precise description of concepts, measures etc. are described, to allow full comprehension of recommendations and comparisons.

2.2.3. Conclusion

All guidelines should come to clear and balanced conclusions. The conclusion should be as widely valid as possible and should cover different approaches. Whenever possible the level of evidence should be indicated for any conclusion made.

In case of target-volume-guidelines the suggestions should be as clear as possible using well-defined anatomical landmarks and margin sizes. Whenever possible a distinction between evidence based (results of trials) and consensus-based recommendations should be made clear.

2.2.4. Limitations

In addition to clear conclusions any overt limitation, especially those that were actively accepted, should be made clear.

2.2.5. Review of guidelines

The writing committee will suggest individuals for an independent reviewing committee. The reviewing committees will be independent from the writing committee. The reviewing board has to be adequately balanced in terms of scientific and clinical competence as well as geographically balanced. If deemed necessary, ACROP can bring in additional reviewers.

The reviewing process may be a constant feedback process (taking place already during the preparation of the guideline) or a single review process (taking place after the finalisation of the manuscript). All open issues and critical points that have risen during the review process will be adequately documented and stored centrally in ESTRO.

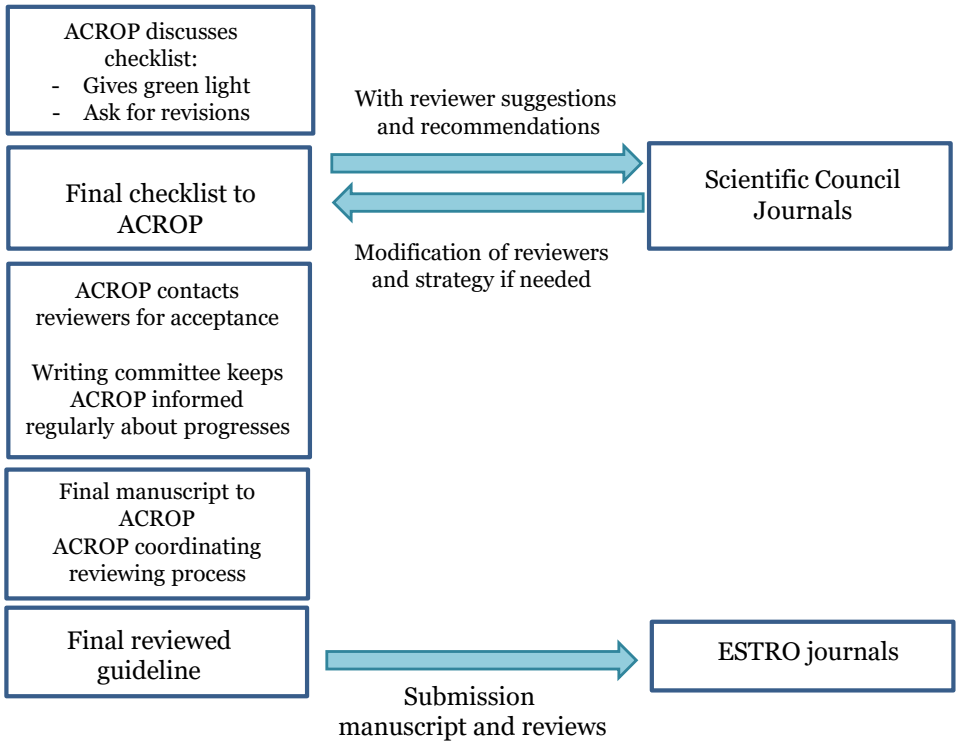
If the review process is based on a single review, the process follows the regular journal style review process including a written review and a point by point response addressing all open issues. The review process will later be made available to the editors of the journal, to which the guideline is submitted to, for their final decision.
To enhance the visibility of the reviewers, ACROP proposes (in exceptional circumstances) to include active reviewers, who sensibly contribute to the shaping of the guidelines, as authors of the guidelines. The final decision on whether to include a reviewer as author, rests with the writing committee of the guideline. Furthermore, it is strongly suggested to include an addendum with the role of and the specific expertise provided by every author and reviewer in the drafting of the guideline.

2.2.6. Publication strategy

All ESTRO or ESTRO endorsed guidelines will be published in one of the ESTRO journals (preferentially as open access articles) allowing for a wide and free dissemination of the guideline. To avoid delays, the journal will not perform a further review and adopt the ACROP process (cfr 2.2.5). Their ACROP reviewers' comments and the responses from the writing committee will be sent to the journal for their information.

ACROP submits together with the manuscript the documentation of the reviewing process, which has taken place prior to submission. The editors of the ESTRO journal, to which the guideline is submitted to, take the final decision on whether the manuscript is appropriate for publication in the journal.

Upon giving the 'green light' on a checklist ACROP will consult with the Editor-in-Chief of the Green Journal regarding its publication. ACROP will inform the chair of the writing committee on where the guideline will be published.



Workflow within ESTRO and its journals

2.2.7. Updating strategy

Any writing committee has to provide realistic timelines and define responsibilities regarding regular updates and updates in case of paradigm changing novelties.

All guidelines should have a putative "decay" time of 3 years after which the need for and the content of the given guideline per se will be re-checked. It is intended that the writing committee stays in place at least for the first three years.

2.2.8 Timeline

Guideline should be submitted for publication approximately 1 year after the checklist has been accepted by ACROP.
If there are no deliverables one year after a checklist has been submitted, ACROP reserves the right to stop the activity or, to render the checklist invalid and to ask the chair of the writing committee to re-submit the checklist for re-consideration.

3. PROCEDURE FOR MULTIDISCIPLINARY GUIDELINES ISSUED BY OTHER CONSORTIA

This chapter gives an overview of the process for responding to requests from external stakeholders who might ask the ESTRO collaboration in guidelines drafting. In most instances, the preparation pathway for guidelines issued by other scientific groups will follow jointly determined rules and policies, often these accords are based on ad hoc agreements that should be discussed individually but keeping in mind the ACROP general procedures.

For this reason, it is required to define the process of communication inside ESTRO, the prioritisation of the guidelines, the choice of ESTRO experts and the definition of an appropriate publication policy ensuring the protection of ESTRO's interests.

3.1 Joint initiative

In a joint initiative, ESTRO is an equal partner in the development of the guidelines.
The name ESTRO should be included in the title of the guideline.

ACROP receives and discusses the proposal (teleconferencing and e-mailing). The proposal and the ACROP initial feedback are transferred to the Scientific Council for insight. When deemed appropriate by the council and ACROP, the ESTRO Board will be consulted.

Feedback will be collected within 2 weeks, in order to ensure completeness, and will be given to the proposing society. The feedback should take into account the following points:

- *Rationale, content of the guidelines*
- *Proposed experts*
- *Proposed ESTRO internal reviewers*
- *Budget*
- *Publication policy*

The budget must be discussed case by case with the societies included in the consortium. Being an equal partner, ESTRO can cover part of the expenses for the development of joint initiatives, if previously agreed within the consortium. In the case when the ACROP budget is not sufficient for covering the financial contribution to the guideline, the ESTRO Executive Council will be consulted.

Being a joint initiative, guidelines should be published by all partners in their official journals. Publication should happen contemporarily whenever possible, agreeing on beforehand on the publication schedule. Dissemination of the guidelines should be a priority for all partners.

Once the final agreement within ACROP has been taken, the ESTRO office will inform the proposing society, the Scientific Council and the Green Journal.
The Scientific Council should receive regular updates on guidelines in process and their costs.

3.2 Initiative from external society: ESTRO as collaborator

We define ESTRO as a collaborator in the developing of guidelines when an external society asks ESTRO to provide experts in specific areas.
The name ESTRO can be included in the title of the guidelines; the inclusion of the name ESTRO in the title of the guidelines will be discussed case by case.

ACROP receives and discusses the proposal (teleconferencing and e-mailing), taking the decision regarding involvement/participation, ESTRO experts to be appointed for contribution and internal ESTRO reviewers to oversee the final work.

Feedback regarding ESTRO participation and suggestions of experts will be collected within 2 weeks, in order to ensure completeness of the feedback; and be given to the proposing society.
The ESTRO office will contact beforehand the proposed experts, to ascertain their availability. Once the proposed experts have been accepted by the leading society, it is the responsibility of the leading society to keep contact with the proposed experts and co-ordinate the delivery of the work with them, keeping always an ACROP representative and the ESTRO office informed.

The budget should be discussed ad hoc with the leading society. In principle expenses should be covered by the society leading the guidelines. If exceptions are requested, these should be approved by ACROP according to its annual budget. In the case when the ACROP budget is not sufficient to cover the financial contribution to the guideline, the ESTRO Executive Council will be consulted.

Clear suggestions regarding the publication policy should be provided by the leading society, if not, ACROP and the Scientific Council will suggest a suitable publication policy.

Once the final agreement within ACROP has been taken, the ESTRO office will inform the proposing society, the Scientific Council and the Green Journal.

The Scientific Council should receive regular updates on guidelines in process and their costs.

3.3 Society with whom ESTRO has a signed MoU

The Society proposing the guidelines has a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with ESTRO.

If the MoU in place does foresee the drafting of common guidelines, then the ad hoc arrangements included in the MoU should be respected.

If the MoU does not foresee the drafting of common guidelines, then ACROP follows the procedure according the type of guideline proposed: joint or with ESTRO as collaborator.
Though, it is recommended to pursue joint guidelines with those societies having a MoU with ESTRO.

4. DOCUMENT HISTORY

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