

OPTN/UNOS Liver and Intestinal Organ Transplantation Committee
Meeting Summary
February 25, 2016
Conference Call

Ryutaro Hirose, MD, Chair
Julie Heimbach, MD, Vice Chair

Discussions of the full committee on February 25, 2016 are summarized below. All committee meeting summaries are available at <http://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/>.

Committee Projects

1. National Liver Review Board

Representatives shared the feedback they have received on the National Liver Review Board (NLRB) proposal at the recent regional meetings (Regions 4, 6, 7, 8, and 11). While most regional meeting attendees have been supportive of the proposed structure and operational guidelines for the NLRB, they are withholding full support until the Committee determines how the exception MELD/PELD scores will be assigned.

Regional Feedback for Further Policy Development

The Committee is requesting modeling to inform its decision of how to assign the exception MELD/PELD scores. To refine the modeling request, the Committee reviewed the regional feedback thus far on whether it is appropriate to:

- Award exception candidates one or two MELD points below the median allocation MELD at transplant for the candidate's Donor Service Area (DSA).
- Remove the automatic three-month increases in standardized exception scores, also referred to as the "MELD elevator."

Two regions expressed interest in knowing how the MELD assignment would work if redistricting is implemented. One suggested that the Committee examine assigning the MELD score at two points below the "first level of allocation," in other words, the district. Another suggested that eliminating the MELD elevator would work under the current system but may disadvantage exception patients under broader sharing. However, most regional meeting attendees acknowledge that the automatic increases in exception scores upon extension are contributing to national MELD inflation.

The Committee clarified that exception policy regarding how exception MELD/PELD scores are assigned to candidates with Hepatic Artery Thrombosis (HAT) and Metabolic Disease will not change. The modeled revisions to the exception score assignment applies to all other standardized diagnoses in Policy 9.3.C.

The Committee reviewed the modeling request for the SRTR and will finalize it in April. The Committee anticipates reviewing the modeling results in the fall and releasing an NLRB proposal for a second round of public comment in January 2017.

Study Variances

Most regions have adopted independent criteria used to request and approve exceptions, commonly referred to as "regional agreements." Some regions have used these agreements to investigate changes to the exception system. If a change is successful, sometimes other regions adopt similar protocols, as we have seen with

Hepatocellular Carinoma (HCC) downstaging. After much discussion, the Committee leadership suggested that the NLRB does not have to exclude the possibility of approved studies to test variances in the exception system. These studies need to be time-limited with established protocol and oversight. The Committee can review the outcome of these studies to determine whether there is sufficient evidence for a policy change. One member reiterated that the OPTN must be judicious in approving these studies so that it does not undermine the purpose of the NLRB, which is to eliminate geographic variation in exception practices.

Implemented Committee Projects

2. Reinstate Override Button for Unresolved Exception Requests

If the Regional Review Board does not approve an exception application within 21 days, current policy allows a transplant physician to register the candidate at the request MELD/PELD score following a conference call with the RRB. The case would then be automatically referred to the Liver and Intestinal Organ Transplantation Committee, and potentially the MPSC, for review. When this policy was first implemented in 2002, the physician could accomplish this by selecting the “no appeal/no withdrawal” button on the application after it was denied by the RRB. The button was inadvertently removed when a modification to the policy was subsequently implemented. In June 2009, the Board approved a proposal to reinstate the override button for unresolved exception requests. This was implemented on February 4, 2016.

Upcoming Meetings

- March 24, 2016
- April 27, 2016
- May 19, 2016