

Executive Summary

California Technology Assessment Forum (CTAF) History and Evolution

The California Technology Assessment Forum (CTAF) is a nationally recognized community forum dedicated to objectivity and transparency regarding the safety and effectiveness of emerging medical technologies. CTAF is a leader in the field of technology assessment, providing publicly available syntheses of medical technologies. These reports are used by health plans, providers and patients to guide healthcare decisions and inform health policy initiatives. The current role of CTAF represents decades of evolution reflecting the changing landscape of health care, health plans and medical technology.

The origins of CTAF can be traced back to the 1950's when Blue Shield of California (BSC) established a Medical Policy Committee (MPC) in conjunction with the California Medical Association to examine billing and payment issues. As novel medical technologies began to emerge in the 1970's, MPC evolved to ensure the safety and effectiveness of these new technologies. Importantly, at this time, the committee was restructured as an "open forum" technology assessment process, where a conscious effort was made to solicit input from a variety of perspectives. Using the open forum principles, MPC completed a landmark review of CT scanning, recommending the procedure for selected established conditions. This review was subsequently published in *The Western Journal of Medicine* in 1977.

Building on this expertise in technological assessment, MPC tackled another bold and complex analysis, heart transplantation, in the mid-eighties. Published data to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of this specialized procedure, along with public testimony from the practicing medical community and institutions, led to the conclusion that heart transplantation for end-stage heart failure could be approved for selected sites only. Throughout the eighties, MPC continued to respond to the explosion in new technologies, skyrocketing healthcare costs, and the emergence of outcomes research by holding fast to their well established methodology for technology assessment. Early efforts by MPC established

many of the principles that guide CTAF today, e.g., systematic literature review, active solicitation of input on both sides of an issue, a forum open to the public, and publication of results.

By the onset of the nineties, technology assessment performed by MPC had evolved into a more sophisticated and explicit process, reflecting its importance as a component of medical policy coverage development. Therefore, in 1990, the Medical Policy Committee was renamed the Medical Policy Committee for Quality and Technology (MPCQT). The committee further standardized the assessment process to ensure objectivity and transparency by adopting the five Blue Cross Blue Shield Association Technology Evaluation Center (TEC) criteria. By the late 1990's, MPCQT decided to modify the descriptors to highlight a hierarchy of evidence and call attention to what constitutes more and less convincing study designs. These revised criteria established the yardstick used to determine whether or not a technology was considered investigational.

A critical test of this more sophisticated and explicit approach was the assessment of the highly contentious autologous bone marrow transplantation (ABMT) for treatment of metastatic breast cancer. As emotional and litigious debates swirled around this topic, MPCQT used their rigorous process for review of scientific evidence and deemed the procedure investigational. Today, ABMT for breast cancer has been largely abandoned, confirming the necessity of following the established assessment process. The full details of this extraordinary story were published in 2007 by Oxford University Press in the book *False Hope: Bone Marrow Transplantation for Breast Cancer* by Rettig, Jacobson, Farquhar, and Aubry.

As a new century approached, MPCQT began to recognize that the data-driven approach to technology assessments could be enhanced by reaching a shared perspective through the open forum debate among physicians, manufacturers and patients. Dialogue to create a common understanding of the evidence base necessary to ensure safety and effectiveness catalyzed the transformation of MPCQT into the current California Technology Assessment Forum (CTAF).

CTAF developed clear and concise vision and mission statements that reaffirmed the importance of a culture of patient care in which the use of medical technologies is based on scientific evidence. Management of CTAF was placed under the direct supervision of Blue Shield of California Foundation, which is a separate nonprofit that receives funding from the Blue Shield of California health plan, but is governed by its own board of trustees. CTAF became not only a community forum for dialogue and decisions regarding the safety and effectiveness of new and emerging technologies, but a public benefit for the State of California. CTAF technology assessments are available to all organizations worldwide at www.ctaf.org.

CTAF technology assessments were leveraged by the Foundation through complementary grantmaking to organizations who attempt to fill in the identified knowledge gaps. Current grantees include the Health Technology Center, the Center for Medical Technology Policy, the Institute of Medicine Roundtable on Evidence-Based Medicine, the Institute of Clinical and Economic Research (ICER) of Harvard Medical School, the Focused Research on Efficient Secure Healthcare (FRESH-Thinking) group at Stanford University and the University of California, San Francisco where researchers are developing a framework for the use of personalized (genomic) medicine.

CTAF and its predecessors have steadily evolved over the past decades to meet the changing landscape of medical and health policy. From its beginnings as a straightforward proprietary exercise in setting reimbursement guidelines, CTAF has emerged into a nationally recognized community forum that addresses some of the most challenging questions related to medical technology. While the technology assessments produced by CTAF originally had a focused role as the basis of medical coverage policy, currently these assessments serve as a starting point of discussion for a wide variety of health policy issues by a variety of constituents. CTAF, in concert with Blue Shield of California Foundation, is continually exploring new ways to leverage the technology assessments to inform broader health policy debates on both a local and national level.

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