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The American College of Radiology will periodically define new practice parameters and technical standards for radiologic practice to help advance the science of radiology and to improve the quality of service to patients throughout the United States. Existing practice parameters and technical standards will be reviewed for revision or renewal, as appropriate, on their fifth anniversary or sooner, if indicated.

Each practice parameter and technical standard, representing a policy statement by the College, has undergone a thorough consensus process in which it has been subjected to extensive review and approval. The practice parameters and technical standards recognize that the safe and effective use of diagnostic and therapeutic radiology requires specific training, skills, and techniques, as described in each document. Reproduction or modification of the published practice parameter and technical standard by those entities not providing these services is not authorized.

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ACR–ACOG–AIUM–SPR–SRU PRACTICE PARAMETER FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF ULTRASOUND OF THE FEMALE PELVIS

PREAMBLE

This document is an educational tool designed to assist practitioners in providing appropriate radiologic care for patients. Practice Parameters and Technical Standards are not inflexible rules or requirements of practice and are not intended, nor should they be used, to establish a legal standard of care¹. For these reasons and those set forth below, the American College of Radiology and our collaborating medical specialty societies caution against the use of these documents in litigation in which the clinical decisions of a practitioner are called into question.

The ultimate judgment regarding the propriety of any specific procedure or course of action must be made by the practitioner in light of all the circumstances presented. Thus, an approach that differs from the guidance in this document, standing alone, does not necessarily imply that the approach was below the standard of care. To the contrary, a conscientious practitioner may responsibly adopt a course of action different from that set forth in this document when, in the reasonable judgment of the practitioner, such course of action is indicated by the condition of the patient, limitations of available resources, or advances in knowledge or technology subsequent to publication of this document. However, a practitioner who employs an approach substantially different from the guidance in this document is advised to document in the patient record information sufficient to explain the approach taken.

The practice of medicine involves not only the science, but also the art of dealing with the prevention, diagnosis, alleviation, and treatment of disease. The variety and complexity of human conditions make it impossible to always reach the most appropriate diagnosis or to predict with certainty a particular response to treatment. Therefore, it should be recognized that adherence to the guidance in this document will not assure an accurate diagnosis or a successful outcome. All that should be expected is that the practitioner will follow a reasonable course of action based on current knowledge, available resources, and the needs of the patient to deliver effective and safe medical care. The sole purpose of this document is to assist practitioners in achieving this objective.

¹ *Iowa Medical Society and Iowa Society of Anesthesiologists v. Iowa Board of Nursing*, ___ N.W.2d ___ (Iowa 2013) Iowa Supreme Court refuses to find that the *ACR Technical Standard for Management of the Use of Radiation in Fluoroscopic Procedures* (Revised 2008) sets a national standard for who may perform fluoroscopic procedures in light of the standard's stated purpose that ACR standards are educational tools and not intended to establish a legal standard of care. See also, *Stanley v. McCarver*, 63 P.3d 1076 (Ariz. App. 2003) where in a concurring opinion the Court stated that "published standards or guidelines of specialty medical organizations are useful in determining the duty owed or the standard of care applicable in a given situation" even though ACR standards themselves do not establish the standard of care.

I. INTRODUCTION

The clinical aspects contained in specific sections of this practice parameter (Introduction, Indications, Specifications of the Examination, and Equipment Specifications) were developed collaboratively by the American College of Radiology (ACR), the American Institute of Ultrasound in Medicine (AIUM), the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), the Society of Pediatric Radiology (SPR), and the Society of Radiologists in Ultrasound (SRU). Recommendations for physician requirements, written request for the examination, documentation, and quality control vary among the 4 organizations and are addressed by each separately.

This practice parameter has been developed to assist physicians performing sonographic studies of the female pelvis. Ultrasound of the female pelvis should be performed only when there is a valid medical reason, and the lowest possible ultrasonic exposure settings should be used to gain the necessary diagnostic information. In some cases, additional or specialized examinations may be necessary. Although it is not possible to detect every abnormality, adherence to the following practice parameter will maximize the probability of detecting most abnormalities. For ultrasound of the urinary bladder see [ACR-AIUM-SPR-SRU Practice Parameter for the Performance of an Ultrasound Examination of the Abdomen and/or Retroperitoneum](#).

II. INDICATIONS

Indications for pelvic sonography include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Evaluation of pelvic pain
2. Evaluation of pelvic masses
3. Evaluation of endocrine abnormalities, including polycystic ovaries
4. Evaluation of dysmenorrhea (painful menses)
5. Evaluation of amenorrhea
6. Evaluation of abnormal vaginal bleeding
7. Evaluation of delayed menses
8. Follow-up of a previously detected abnormality
9. Evaluation, monitoring, and/or treatment of infertility patients
10. Evaluation when there is limited clinical examination of the pelvis
11. Evaluation for signs or symptoms of pelvic infection
12. Further characterization of a pelvic abnormality noted on another imaging study
13. Evaluation of congenital uterine and lower genital tract anomalies
14. Evaluation of excessive bleeding, pain, or signs of infection after pelvic surgery, delivery, or abortion
15. Localization of an intrauterine contraceptive device
16. Screening for malignancy in high-risk patients
17. Evaluation of incontinence or pelvic organ prolapse
18. Guidance for interventional or surgical procedures
19. Preoperative and postoperative evaluation of pelvic structures

III. QUALIFICATIONS OF PERSONNEL

Each organization will address this section in its document. ACR language is as follows:

See the [ACR-SPR-SRU Practice Parameter for Performing and Interpreting Diagnostic Ultrasound Examinations](#).

IV. WRITTEN REQUEST FOR THE EXAMINATION

Each organization will address this section in its document. ACR language is as follows:

The written or electronic request for a pelvic ultrasound examination should provide sufficient information to demonstrate the medical necessity of the examination and allow for its proper performance and interpretation.

Documentation that satisfies medical necessity includes 1) signs and symptoms and/or 2) relevant history (including known diagnoses). Additional information regarding the specific reason for the examination or a provisional diagnosis would be helpful and may at times be needed to allow for the proper performance and interpretation of the examination.

The request for the examination must be originated by a physician or other appropriately licensed health care provider. The accompanying clinical information should be provided by a physician or other appropriately licensed health care provider familiar with the patient's clinical problem or question and consistent with the state's scope of practice requirements. (ACR Resolution 35, adopted in 2006)

V. SPECIFICATIONS OF THE EXAMINATION

The following section details the examination to be performed for each organ and anatomic region in the female pelvis. All relevant structures should be identified by the transabdominal and/or transvaginal approach. A transrectal or transperineal approach may be useful in patients who are not candidates for introduction of a vaginal probe and in assessing the patient with pelvic organ prolapse. More than one approach may be necessary [1,2].

A. General Pelvic Preparation

For a complete transabdominal pelvic sonogram, the patient's bladder can be distended if necessary to displace the small bowel from the field of view. Occasionally, overdistention of the bladder may compromise the evaluation. When this occurs, imaging may be repeated after partial bladder emptying. If an abnormality of the urinary bladder is detected, it should be documented and reported.

For a transvaginal sonogram, the urinary bladder is preferably empty. The patient, the sonographer, or the physician may introduce the vaginal transducer, preferably under real-time monitoring. Consideration of having a chaperone present should be in accordance with local policy [3].

B. Uterus

The vagina and uterus provide anatomic landmarks that can be used as reference points for the other pelvic structures, whether normal or abnormal. In examining the uterus, the following should be evaluated: a) the uterine size, shape, and orientation; b) the endometrium; c) the myometrium; and d) the cervix. The vagina may be imaged as a landmark for the cervix.

Overall uterine length is evaluated in sagittal view from the fundus to the cervix (to the external os, if it can be identified). The depth of the uterus (anteroposterior dimension) is measured in the same sagittal view from its anterior to posterior walls, perpendicular to the length. The maximum width is measured in the transverse or coronal view. If volume measurements of the uterine corpus are performed, the cervical component should be excluded from the uterine length measurement.

Abnormalities of the uterus should be documented [4]. The myometrium and cervix should be evaluated for contour changes, echogenicity, masses, and cysts. Masses that may require follow-up or intervention should be measured in at least 2 dimensions, acknowledging that it is not usually necessary to measure all uterine fibroids. Size and location of clinically relevant fibroids should be documented.

The endometrium should be analyzed for thickness, focal abnormality, echogenicity, and the presence of fluid or masses in the cavity. The thickest part of the endometrium should be measured perpendicular to its longitudinal plane in the anteroposterior diameter from echogenic to echogenic border (see Figure 1). The adjacent hypoechoic myometrium and fluid in the cavity should be excluded (see Figure 2). Assessment of the endometrium should allow for variations expected with phases of the menstrual cycle and with hormonal supplementation [5-7]. It should be reported if the endometrium is not adequately seen in its entirety or is ill-defined. Sonohysterography may be a useful adjunct to evaluate the patient with abnormal uterine bleeding or to further clarify an abnormally thickened endometrium. (See the [ACR-ACOG-AIUM-SRU Practice Parameter for the Performance of Sonohysterography](#)) If the patient has an intrauterine contraceptive device, its location should be documented.



Figure 1. Measurement of endometrial thickness.

The endometrial thickness measured in its thickest portion from echogenic to echogenic border (calipers) perpendicular to the midline longitudinal plane of the uterus.



Figure 2. Measurement of endometrium with fluid in cavity. In the presence of endometrial fluid, the measurement of the two separate layers of the endometrium (calipers), excluding the fluid, are added to determine the endometrial thickness.

The addition of 3-D to 2-D ultrasound (transabdominal, transvaginal, transperineal, and/or transrectal) can be helpful in many circumstances, including, but not limited to, evaluating the relationship of masses to the endometrial cavity, identifying uterine congenital anomalies and thickened and/or heterogenous endometrium, and evaluating the location of an IUD and the integrity of the pelvic floor [8,9].

C. Adnexa Including Ovaries and Fallopian Tubes

When evaluating the adnexa, an attempt should be made to identify the ovaries first since they can serve as a major point of reference for assessing the presence of adnexal pathology. Ovarian size may be determined by measuring the ovary in 3 dimensions (width, length, and depth) on views obtained in 2 orthogonal planes [10]. Any ovarian abnormalities should be documented [11-15].

The ovaries may not be identifiable in some females. This occurs most frequently prior to puberty, after menopause, or in the presence of a large leiomyomatous uterus. The adnexal region should be surveyed for abnormalities, particularly masses and dilated tubular structures.

If an adnexal abnormality is noted, its relationship to the ovaries and uterus should be assessed. The size and sonographic characteristics of adnexal masses should be documented.

Spectral, color, and/or power Doppler ultrasound may be useful to evaluate the vascular characteristics of pelvic lesions [16-19].

D. Cul-de-Sac

The cul-de-sac and bowel posterior to the uterus may not be clearly defined. This area should be evaluated for the presence of free fluid or mass. If a mass is detected, its size, position, shape, sonographic characteristics, and relationship to the ovaries and uterus should be documented. Differentiation of normal loops of bowel from a mass may be difficult if only a transabdominal examination is performed. A transvaginal examination may be helpful to distinguish a suspected mass from fluid and feces within the normal rectosigmoid colon.

VI. DOCUMENTATION

Each organization will address this section in its document. ACR language is as follows:

Adequate documentation is essential for high-quality patient care. There should be a permanent record of the ultrasound examination and its interpretation. Cine clips may be useful. Comparison with prior relevant imaging studies may prove helpful. Images of all appropriate areas, both normal and abnormal, should be recorded. Variations from normal size should generally be accompanied by measurements. Images should be labeled with the patient identification, facility identification, examination date, and image orientation. An official interpretation (final report) of the ultrasound examination should be included in the patient's medical record. Retention of the ultrasound examination images should be consistent both with clinical need and with relevant legal and local health care facility requirements.

Reporting should be in accordance with the [ACR Practice Parameter for Communication of Diagnostic Imaging Findings](#).

VII. EQUIPMENT SPECIFICATIONS

The sonographic examination of the female pelvis should be conducted with a real-time scanner, preferably using sector, curved linear, and/or endovaginal transducers. The transducer or scanner should be adjusted to operate at the highest clinically appropriate frequency, realizing that there is a trade-off between resolution and beam penetration [3].

VIII. QUALITY CONTROL AND IMPROVEMENT, SAFETY, INFECTION CONTROL, AND PATIENT EDUCATION

Each organization will address this section in its document. ACR language is as follows:

All probes should be cleaned after use. Vaginal probes should be covered by a protective sheath prior to insertion. Following the examination, the sheath should be disposed of and the probe cleaned in an antimicrobial solution. The type of solution and amount of time for cleaning depend on manufacturer and infectious disease recommendations.

Policies and procedures related to quality, patient education, infection control, and safety should be developed and implemented in accordance with the ACR Policy on Quality Control and Improvement, Safety, Infection Control, and Patient Education appearing under the heading *Position Statement on QC & Improvement, Safety, Infection Control, and Patient Education* on the ACR website (<http://www.acr.org/guidelines>).

Equipment performance monitoring should be in accordance with the [ACR Technical Standard for Diagnostic Medical Physics Performance Monitoring of Real Time Ultrasound Equipment](#).

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Committee on Practice Parameters and Technical Standards of the ACR Commissions on Ultrasound and Pediatric Radiology in collaboration with the ACOG, the AIUM, the SPR, and the SRU.

Collaborative Committee

Members represent their societies in the initial and final revision of this practice parameter.

ACR

Marcela Bohm-Velez, MD, FACR, Chair
M. Stephen Ledbetter, MD, MPH
Henrietta Kotlus Rosenberg, MD, FACR
Jason M. Wagner, MD

ACOG

Daniel M. Breitkopf, MD
Wendy R. Brewster, MD, PhD
John W. Seeds, MD

AIUM

Beryl R. Benacerraf, MD, FACR
Steven R. Goldstein, MD
Elizabeth Puscheck, MD
Laurel Stadtmauer, MD

SPR

Amy N. Dahl, MD
Kassa Darge, MD, PhD
Lynn A. Fordham, MD, FACR

SRU

Rochelle F. Andreotti, MD, FACR
Oksana H. Baltarowich, MD
Anna S. Lev-Toaff, MD, FACR

Committee on Practice Parameters – Ultrasound

(ACR Committee responsible for sponsoring the draft through the process)

Beverly E. Hashimoto, MD, FACR, Chair
Sandra O. DeJesus Allison, MD
Teresita L. Angtuaco, MD, FACR
Marcela Bohm-Velez, MD, FACR
Maria A. Calvo-Garcia, MD
Helena Gabriel, MD
Gail N. Morgan, MD
Maitray D. Patel, MD
Henrietta Kotlus Rosenberg, MD, FACR
Sheila Sheth, MD, FACR
Maryellen R.M. Sun, MD
Sharlene A. Teefey, MD, FACR
Jason M. Wagner, MD

Committee on Practice Parameters – Pediatric Radiology

(ACR Committee responsible for sponsoring the draft through the process)

Eric N. Faerber, MD, FACR, Chair
Sara J. Abramson, MD, FACR
Richard M. Benator, MD, FACR
Lorna P. Browne, MB, BCh
Brian D. Coley, MD, FACR
Monica S. Epelman, MD
Kate A. Feinstein, MD, FACR
Lynn A. Fordham, MD, FACR
Tal Laor, MD

Beverley Newman, MB, BCh, BSc, FACR
Marguerite T. Parisi, MD, MS
Sumit Pruthi, MBBS
Nancy K. Rollins, MD

Deborah Levine, MD, FACR, Chair, Commission on Ultrasound
Marta Hernanz-Schulman, MD, FACR, Chair, Commission on Pediatric Radiology
Debra L. Monticciolo, MD, FACR, Chair, Commission on Quality and Safety
Julie K. Timins, MD, FACR, Chair, Committee on Practice Parameters and Technical Standards

Comments Reconciliation Committee

Jacqueline A. Bello, MD, FACR, Chair
Kristen K. DeStigter, MD, FACR, Co-Chair
Rochelle F. Andreotti, MD, FACR
Kimberly E. Applegate, MD, MS, FACR
Oksana H. Baltarowich, MD
Beryl Benacerraf, MD, FACR
Marcela Bohm-Velez, MD, FACR
Daniel M. Breitkopf, MD
Wendy R. Brewster, MD, PhD
Douglas L. Brown, MD
Harris L. Cohen, MD, FACR
Amy N. Dahl, MD
Kassa Darge, MD, PhD
Monica S Epelman, MD
Eric N. Faerber, MD, FACR
Lynn A. Fordham, MD, FACR
Pat F. Fulgham, MD
Steven R. Goldstein, MD
Beverly E. Hashimoto, MD, FACR
Marta Hernanz-Schulman, MD, FACR
William T. Herrington, MD, FACR
Paul A Larson, MD, FACR
M. Stephen Ledbetter, MD, MPH
Deborah Levine, MD, FACR
Anna S. Lev-Toaff, MD, FACR
Debra L. Monticciolo, MD, FACR
Marthe Munden, MD
Elizabeth Puscheck, MD
Henrietta Kotlus Rosenberg, MD, FACR
John W. Seeds, MD
Laurel Stadtmauer, MD
Julie K. Timins, MD, FACR
Jason M. Wagner, MD

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