



Powers and Duties of Reference Committees

National Conference of Family Medicine Residents and Medical Students – Kansas City, MO

Reference Committees are created to facilitate the work of the Congress. Instead of debating details and hearing all evidence for or against a resolution when it is originally submitted to the Congress, it is referred to the appropriate Reference Committee. The purpose of the committee is to develop a "pre-consensus" on each issue to be considered later by the full Congress. There are several advantages to this system:

1. Several items can be discussed at the same time in different Reference Committees, allowing attendees a choice of which discussion to attend.
2. Snap judgments on difficult issues will be avoided.
3. Resolutions which require rather complex or precise wording can be carefully honed prior to a final vote. It is often not possible to achieve this by the more rigid process of voting on a series of amendments.

At a scheduled hearing, all resident and student members interested in the particular proposal present their views to the Reference Committee. Attendees are free to move between different hearing rooms, provided they can do so quietly. Every pertinent point should be heard and considered by the Reference Committee. However, it is necessary to limit or avoid extraneous comments in order that the committee can devote full attention to the subject at hand and complete its work in the brief time available.

The following guidelines describe the conduct of the hearings and the work of the Reference Committees.

Conduct of Hearings

- (1) A list of the order of business for each Reference Committee hearing will be provided to participants before the hearings begin. The list is a suggested order of business. The Reference Committee Chair may elect to delay a discussion of items to facilitate the participation of individuals presenting testimony in more than one Reference Committee hearing.
- (2) Members of the Reference Committee will sit together at the table in front of the room. The Chair of the Reference Committee will conduct business from the podium.
- (3) The Chair should call the meeting to order promptly at the time designated.
- (4) There will be floor microphones in each Reference Committee hearing. The Chair will ask speakers to identify themselves by name and chapter after being recognized by the Chair.
- (5) *The Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure*, current edition, specifies the following: "The chair of the reference committee presides at the hearings and facilitates discussion. As far as possible, all who wish to speak should be heard and a few persons should not be permitted to monopolize the discussion. The committee may limit the length of time allowed each speaker. The chair cannot permit motions or votes at the hearing since its objective is only to receive information and opinions; decisions of any sort during the hearing would hamper the reference committee in its private deliberations."

(6) Any AAFP member has the privilege of speaking at a Reference Committee hearing. The Chair also may request nonmembers to provide needed information to clarify or present essential facts on an item under discussion. Otherwise, nonmembers will be granted the floor only upon permission of the Reference Committee Chair. Requests from nonmembers wishing to testify should be made prior to the start of the Reference Committee hearing.

(7) Discussion on any item may be reopened, if necessary, to obtain additional information from those not present when the original discussion took place.

(8) It is suggested that Reference Committee members make notes of pertinent points brought up during testimony on each item to serve as guidance and preparation of the final report. It is not necessary that minutes be kept of a Reference Committee hearing. It is only necessary that the committee hear all the evidence to enable it to reach an informed decision and prepare its report. The Recording Secretary, assigned to each Reference Committee, should sit near the committee Chair to assist in making notes of pertinent points which may serve as guidance in preparation of the final report. If a statement is made in the hearing which the Chair wishes to incorporate in the report, it is proper before proceeding to ask that it be repeated to make certain the Recording Secretary has the information.

(9) As soon as a reasonable opportunity has been afforded for all parties to express their views on a particular report or resolution, the Chair should move quickly on to the next item on the agenda.

Work of the Reference Committees

(10) Executive Session. Immediately following adjournment of the Reference Committee hearings, the Reference Committee members will convene in Executive Session to review their notes and to determine a specific action for each item. No one other than members of the committee, including any assigned observer(s), and assigned staff are to attend this Executive Session unless invited by the Chair to provide needed information. The Speaker, Vice Speaker, and AAFP staff is available for consultation at the invitation of the Reference Committee Chair. Based on testimony presented in the hearings and, with their own knowledge of the issues involved, the Reference Committee will make the following determination for each item:

- (1) Recommend the resolved clauses of the item be:
 - (a) Adopted
 - (b) Not Adopted
 - (c) Revised via Substitute Resolution (e.g., Resolution 10 becomes Substitute Resolution 10)
 - (d) Included on a Reaffirmation Calendar because it reflects current policy or is being addressed in existing programs and services
- (2) Determine if the resolved clauses of the item (if adopted or substituted) should be sent to:
 - (a) AAFP Congress of Delegates (COD)
 - (b) AAFP Commission on Education (COE)

The determination of whether to send a resolution to the Congress of Delegates or to the COE is a judgment call best decided with the input of the NCFMR/NCSM officers and the AAFP staff persons assisting the Reference Committees. In general, a resolution should not be sent to the AAFP Congress of Delegates if it requires further study, if the background information supporting the resolved clause is insufficient, or if the Reference Committee is unsure if the requested action is already in place within the AAFP structure. For example, resolutions which call for the AAFP to adopt a policy statement should be checked against existing AAFP policies and clinical recommendations on the AAFP website.

The option of referral to the COE mandates that the COE will investigate an issue further. Following its investigation, the COE may or may not elect to make a recommendation, based on the resolution, to the AAFP Board of Directors.

Whether a resolution is referred to the Congress of Delegates or the COE, a report summarizing the outcome of each resolution will be provided at the next NCFMR/NCSM.

(11) Writing the Report. The content of the Reference Committee report is the responsibility of the Chair and the Reference Committee. The final report of each Reference Committee will be written by the Reference Committee Chair with the assistance of AAFP staff. The format for the report will include the following elements for each item of business:

- a. Statement of the item number, resolution number and the title of the resolution.
- b. The original resolved clauses of the resolution.
- c. A brief statement summarizing the testimony heard on the item and statements justifying the Reference Committee's recommended action.
- d. The Reference Committee's recommendation noting whether the items should be adopted, not adopted, adopted as a substitute resolution, or included on a Reaffirmation Calendar.
- e. The order of items in the Reference Committee report may follow any order, however in instances where multiple items on the same subject are considered together, order of consideration of the items is determined by action recommended. Items are then presented in the following sequence: recommendation to adopt, recommendation to adopt a substitute, and then recommendation to not adopt.
- f. It is customary for the Reference Committee Chair at the conclusion of his/her report to include a written thank you message to the committee members and all those who assist in its deliberations.

In writing the committee's report, the following elements should also be included:

- a. A header at the top of the page noting "NCFMR/NCSM," identification of which Reference Committee the report relates to, and the date of the report
- b. Numbered lines along the left-hand margin of each page
- c. The following portions of the Reference Committee reports underscored: identification of the items, reference committee's recommended actions, and all substitute resolved clauses
- d. Page numbers for each page of the report

(12) Approval of the Report. The report is finalized following review and approval by the Reference Committee Chair and designated AAFP staff. The names of the Reference Committee members led by the Reference Committee Chair's name should be listed at the end of the report.

(13) Once the Reference Committee report is completed, an index page listing the items from the report will be developed. This index page will represent the consent calendar and will be formatted so that it follows the report. For example, Item 1 from the report will be the first item on the consent calendar with Item 2 from the report as the second item on the consent calendar and so on until all items from the report are so indicated on the consent calendar. Based on the consent calendar, the Reference Committee report will be voted on in one vote by the Official Chapter Representatives (delegates); however, any item or items may be extracted.

(14) Extracted item(s) will be debated and voted on separately. The entire report will not be read. Only the underscored portions will be read by the Reference Committee Chair if extracted and requested by the Business Session Chair. For example, the Reference Committee Chair will read the underscored portion(s) of extracted items and the Business Session Chair will then call for a vote on the recommendation. If discussion should ensue, the Business Session Chair will request the Reference Committee Chair to read the testimony for the recommendation after the first individual has spoken and before discussion proceeds any further.