will be any number of unneeded complications and mortalities.

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REFERENCE
I McKneally MJ, Lewis RJ. Statement of the AATS/STS Joint

To the Editor:
I do believe that there is enough difference in anatomy and in potential complications between fiberoptic bronchoscopy and thoracoscopy that it should be acknowledged that a physician performing a thoracoscopy should have the ability to do an open procedure and “fix” potential complications.

I should also note for the record that in my years as a young staff physician, after pulmonary training, we did thoracoscopy using the fiberoptic bronchoscope. I found this procedure to be quite cumbersome, and subsequent studies indicated that examination of a large volume of fluid for cytology would achieve the same diagnostic efficiency in terms of underlying malignancy. Based on this experience, I decided not to continue to perform this procedure.

I believe that rigid thoracoscopy, using newer instruments and techniques, is an excellent procedure, and that there is reason to limit this procedure to thoracic surgeons.

Douglas W. Jenkins, M.D., F.C.C.P.
(Pulmonary Diseases)
San Antonio, Texas

To the Editor:
I am writing you in the hope that the American Thoracic Society and the American College of Chest Physicians will take a position in support of thoracoscopy as a procedure that can be safely performed by adequately trained pulmonologists. There is overwhelming evidence that thoracoscopy can be done safely and effectively by physicians who are not thoracic surgeons.

A recent statement from the AATS/STS newsletter states that only thoracic surgeons should perform a thoracoscopy because of the potential need for an open surgical procedure. The literature does not support this concern. Furthermore, if surgical backups were necessary, this would be similar to the well-established protocols used by cardiologists who perform percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty with surgical backup.

I agree that the thoracoscopic procedure as utilized by pulmonologists should initially be restricted to pleural biopsy, pleurodesis, and treatment of empyema. However, peripheral nodules and parenchymal biopsies are being performed safely, in addition to laser and cautery coagulation of small leaking blebs. Large parenchymal biopsies requiring stapling or extensive cautery should be reserved for the thoracic surgeon.

The parietal pleura and pleural space have long been the domain of the pulmonologist. The risks and diagnostic yield of transthoracic Cope needle biopsy make this procedure obsolete in comparison to thoracoscopic pleural biopsy. At the very least, a pulmonologist who is proficient in chest-tube placement and management should be entitled to acquire the skills necessary to perform thoracoscopic procedures involving the parietal pleura and the pleural space.

Douglas W. Kane, M.D., and
James O. Shaw, Jr., M.D., F.C.C.P.,
Peninsula Pulmonary Associates,
Newport News, Virginia

To the Editor:
I am writing in support of the position that pulmonologists should not be precluded from performing thoracoscopy. I, too, am frustrated by a certain void in the technique in blind pleural biopsy and cytologic examinations of pleural fluid. I certainly would appreciate the opportunity to directly view, and obtain biopsy specimens from, tissue that is ultimately found to be pathological. This certainly is an area where medical management can preclude the involvement of yet another physician—that is, a surgeon whose further involvement would not otherwise be necessary. It is also noteworthy that adequately trained gastroenterologists probably perform laparoscopic procedures as well as general surgeons.

With these thoughts in mind, I endorse the performance of thoracoscopic procedures by internists/pulmonologists. However, I think that this is an opportunity for both the American Thoracic Society and the American College of Chest Physicians to assume responsibility in providing adequate guidelines for performing these procedures. Certainly, a trainee should have performed an adequate number of procedures to allow the development of clinical competence in various situations. Furthermore, an ongoing case load should be documented to verify continued competence and further reduction of morbidity in the hands of that individual.

I would envision a specific training interval that would exceed 72 h. Perhaps a 6-month rotation of a