



The Royal College of Pathologists  
*Pathology: the science behind the cure*

## Guidance for histopathologists/cytopathologists on reporting at home (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

September 2006

<b>Unique document number</b>	G017
<b>Document name</b>	Guidance for histopathologists/cytopathologists on reporting at home
<b>Version number</b>	2
<b>Produced by</b>	Professor Peter Furness
<b>Date active</b>	September 2006
<b>Date for review</b>	September 2009
<b>Comments</b>	<p>This version replaces the 1<sup>st</sup> edition, produced by Dr Clair du Boulay in January 2004.</p> <p>This version was slightly amended in July 2006 to reflect that the UK Transplant initiative referred to in 1<sup>st</sup> edition did not happen (through lack of funds).</p>

## **Guidance for histopathologists/cytopathologists on reporting at home**

It is NHS policy to introduce more flexible ways of working and, in the context of a national shortage of diagnostic histopathologists, working at home may provide part of a solution for some aspects of the service. Some consultant radiologists and cardiologists already provide an on-call service by looking at images transmitted to their home. Although CPA (UK) Ltd does not allow cytology screeners to work at home full-time, this would not apply to pathologists who spend most of their time working on-site at their place of work. Increasing sub-specialisation and may mean that working at home becomes a particularly appropriate method of evaluating urgent specimens in fields where suitably trained pathologists are not numerous, such as in transplant pathology. The following safeguards should be applied to ensure the highest quality of work from home.

### **Confidentiality**

Pathologists must ensure that only those with legitimate access to patient-identifiable information have access to diagnostic material and reports, and this should be maintained by a system of timed-out computer passwords, as occurs on most NHS computers. There will inevitably be a need for trust in individuals' professionalism not to share sensitive information with family, etc. The professional behaviour of pathologists is governed by requirements in the General Medical Council's *Good Medical Practice* and the College's *Good Pathology Practice*. Issues of confidentiality relating to reporting at home are no different to those relating to other aspects of clinical paperwork or examination marking that is done at home.

### **Record-keeping and transmission of results**

Pathologists should have records and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the receipt and transmission of material, images, reports, etc. Ideally, a system of real-time tracking should be available, as well as a failsafe mechanism to ensure that results are received and acted upon.

### **Audit**

Home working and diagnosis can and should be audited and anyone taking part should agree to this. Methods could include matching the on-screen diagnosis of a cadaveric donor lesion with the definitive diagnosis by direct microscopy of paraffin section.

### **Working conditions**

Pathologists should ensure that the environment in which the reporting is done is suitable, i.e. quiet, free of interruptions and properly resourced with equipment equivalent to the normal workplace. This might include live-video link/telephone. Conditions should meet acceptable standards of occupational health and safety requirements

### **Transport and storage of diagnostic material**

If slides are being transferred between locations, precautions must be taken to ensure their safety.

- a) Material which is irreplaceable, e.g. conventional cervical smears, non-gynaecological cytology preparations and small diagnostic biopsies requiring multiple levels, must be sent by courier or personal delivery by staff, not by Royal Mail.
- b) Other diagnostic material should ideally be sent by courier rather than Royal Mail.
- c) Microscope slides reported at home should be returned at the earliest possible opportunity to the appropriate laboratory, for storage. In the case of post-mortem specimens, storage at home for longer than is necessary for the examination would incur the need for a Human Tissue Authority licence.