



The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

Clinical governance of NHS staff in single-handed practice with particular reference to point-of-care testing

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Comments	<p>A statement from the Ethics Committee. This document was available on the RCPATH website from 20 November–20 December 2006 for members' consultation and received a total of 4 responses. The original document was amended to reflect the feedback. Please email publications@rcpath.org if you wish to see the responses to the feedback received.</p> <p>Professor Carrock Sewell Director of Publications</p>

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The College issued comprehensive guidance on point-of-care testing in 2004. The Ethics Committee has now been invited to comment additionally on the management of specialised assays (with particular reference to point-of-care testing) especially when performed by one person and where there is no provision for sickness or annual leave.

This situation can occur when

- highly specialised testing is provided
- testing has grown from research or development projects and has become used for diagnostic purposes
- only one member of staff has been trained, has particular skills or has a special interest
- the laboratory management process has “lost track” of a test
- methodology has been developed by clinical staff.

The approach is only acceptable when

- clinical need for diagnosis and treatment is evident
- a business case has been made and where there are written protocols (Standard Operating Procedures), including clear lines of governance and proper record keeping
- appropriate quality assurance (QA) is in place
- there is no alternative and efforts are being made to incorporate the test into standard routine use.

It is never good practice to attempt to offer a test where no backup staff are available and laboratories must comply with CPA (UK) Ltd standards. Networks may help to avoid difficulties of cover but it is essential that such arrangements reflect a real and fully regulated service.

The responsibility for identifying and managing such practices lies ultimately with the Trust, which delegates authority to its Clinical Governance process and effectively to laboratory managers, supported by laboratory staff and clinicians.

Specialised testing can often evolve without managers being aware and an audit of all diagnostic tests within a Trust should be performed from time to time. In teaching hospitals, University employed staff, who should have honorary NHS contracts, may be involved and their accountability must be clarified.

References

Royal College of Pathologists. *Guidelines on point-of-care testing*. 2004. www.rcpath.org/resources/pdf/Point-of-CareTesting-updatedOct04.pdf

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