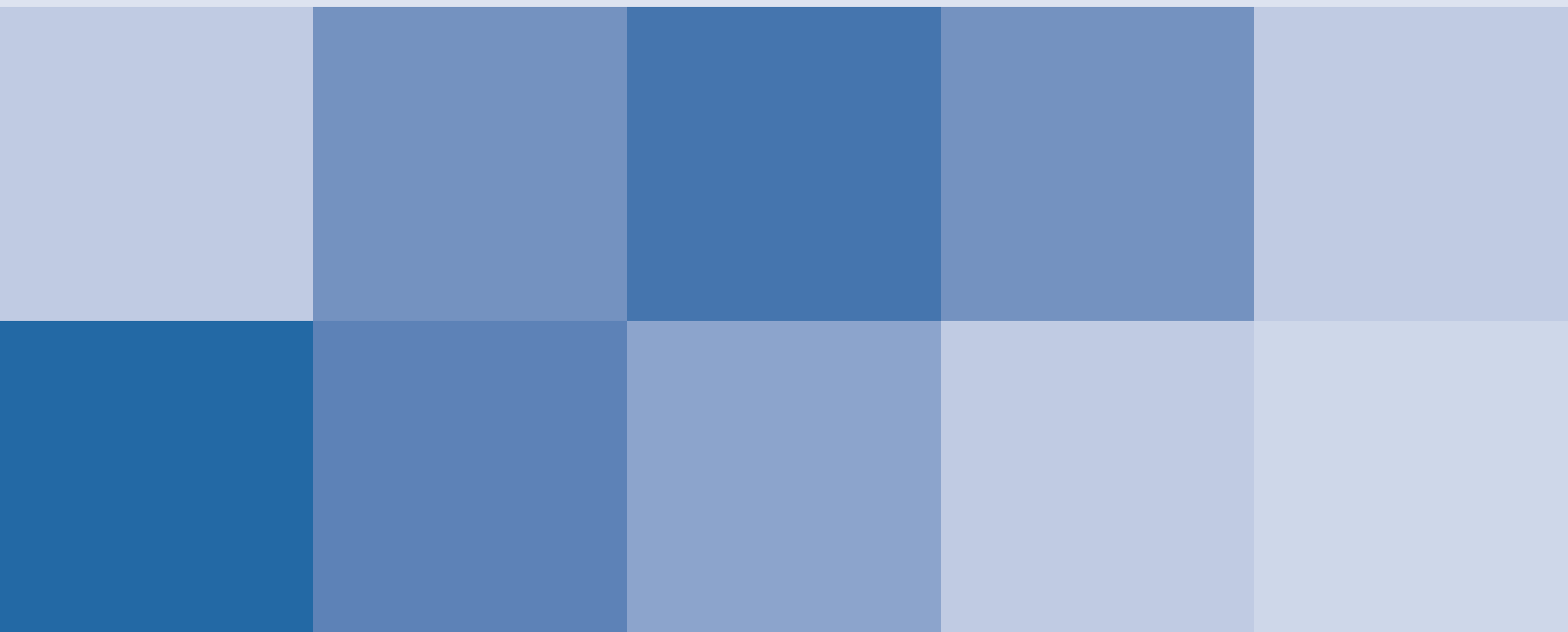




The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

Pathology and the NHS Five Year Forward View



Pathology and the NHS Five Year Forward View

Pathology is the medical specialty at the heart of modern healthcare. It is involved in 70% of all diagnoses made in the NHS. We rely on pathology to diagnose conditions such as cancer, infections and organ damage, screen for congenital diseases and other conditions, monitor the progress of disease and its response to treatment and manage chronic illnesses, such as diabetes. Pathology is vital at every stage of life from assisted conception and prenatal testing to childhood vaccinations, blood tests, cancer screening and the diagnosis and monitoring of long-term conditions.

Without pathology, much of the NHS would grind to a halt.

With the right investment, pathology can play a central role in the delivery of the NHS Five Year Forward View (5YFV) to promote wellbeing, prevent ill health and deliver new models of care.

Key pathology priorities to support the NHS Five Year Forward View

The 5YFV sets out a vision for England’s health service. It was developed by NHS partner organisations to identify the changes necessary to close the widening gaps in the health of the population, quality of care and funding.

Pathology will play a central role in helping deliver

the responsive, high quality and sustainable health system set out in the 5YFV. Pathology can contribute to many of the 5YFV’s ambitions such as narrowing the health and well-being gap, improving the quality of patient care and providing support to people to manage their own health. From these, the Royal College of Pathologists has identified five key priorities that will help deliver the 5YFV:

- 1) [implement the national medical examiner system](#)
- 2) [invest to train the workforce of the future](#)
- 3) [invest in a national molecular pathology service](#)
- 4) [deliver the Choosing Wisely initiative](#)
- 5) [deliver the National Laboratory Medicine Catalogue](#).

Nearly 800 million pathology tests are performed each year in England and Wales. Anyone who has a blood test, cervical smear or tissue biopsy has a pathologist involved in their care.

The Royal College of Pathologists is a charity with over 10,000 members worldwide, most of whom work in hospitals and universities. The College is committed to promoting excellence in the study, research and practice of pathology and is responsible for maintaining the highest standards through training, assessments, examinations and professional development, for the benefit of patients.

NHS Five Year Forward View pledge

A high quality health service which prioritises patient safety, clinical effectiveness and patient experience

Priority: Implement the national medical examiner system

First proposed in 2005 by the Shipman Inquiry and subsequently recommended by both investigations into Mid-Staffordshire (2013) and Morecambe Bay (2015), a national system of medical examiners would provide independent scrutiny of all deaths. This would provide answers for families, accurate statistics to inform future investment in health and identify trends in sub-standard care, enabling remedial action to be taken at the earliest opportunity.

Nine pilot schemes have scrutinised over 23,000 deaths over five years. Evidence from the pilots shows the system would:

- improve accuracy of death certification, providing reliable information to families and those involved in the allocation of resources

- avoid unnecessary distress for families that can result from unanswered questions about the cause of death
- identify any patterns in the deaths examined and make sure information is passed on to those responsible for the overview of care, helping to improve services
- ensure that the right deaths are referred to a coroner for further investigation
- reduce litigation against the NHS by answering relatives’ questions so they don’t resort to legal action to find out what happened to a loved one.

No other patient safety initiative can provide these benefits in such a cost-effective way.

Recommendation: Clear timetable and funding commitment by government to establish a national system of medical examiners.

We will support a modern workforce

Priority: Invest to train the workforce of the future

Pathologists are an integral part of clinical teams. Any successful surgical, medical or oncological team needs appropriate pathology support. Seven day services, an ageing population and advances in personalised medicine mean that demands on pathology services will continue to increase. As training pathologists and scientists takes between five and ten years it is vital that a commitment to a sustained investment in creating a modern workforce is made now.

The diagnosis and monitoring of chronic disease accounts for around half of all pathology activity. An ageing population and unhealthy lifestyles are likely to lead to an increase in chronic disease, such as heart disease, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes.

The Royal College of Pathologists' figures show that currently only one in four chemical pathology training posts is being filled. Over 40% of consultants in the specialty are over the age of 55 and most of these are expected to retire in the next five years. Chemical

pathologists are vital to diagnosing and managing a wide range of long term conditions and other diseases.

The Heath Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, has supported the recommendation of the Independent Cancer Taskforce of a new target of a definitive cancer diagnosis (or the all-clear) for 95% of patients within four weeks of consulting their GP by 2020. The Taskforce also called on Public Health England to examine the evidence for lung and ovarian cancer screening, with a plan for national roll-out if evidence supports it. Pathology plays a central role in all of these initiatives.

The College has noted increasing difficulty in recruiting to consultant posts in cellular pathology. It is vital that investment is made to support the analysis and interpretation of the vast amount of new information that is becoming available for clinical management. Pathology, and particular cellular pathology, plays a key role in the diagnosis of cancer and the monitoring of patients undergoing treatment.

Recommendation: Greater investment in training the pathology workforce of the future, with recognition of the increasing volume and complexity of the workload.

We will accelerate useful health innovation

Priority: Invest in a national molecular pathology service

Molecular pathology has the potential to revolutionise the way in which cancer is diagnosed and treated.

Molecular diagnostic testing means that cancer patients will be treated based on analysis of their tumours at a molecular level. This type of analysis can determine whether a cancer will respond to a particular drug and whether or not an individual patient will benefit from it. Patients will therefore receive a more accurate diagnosis and receive the most effective treatment for their cancer, reducing unnecessary side-effects and increasing their chances of a successful outcome.

However, we know that access to services varies greatly.

The *Atlas of Variation in Diagnostic Services 2013* showed a wide variation in the number of many diagnostic tests requested by GPs. For example, for NHS area teams in England, the rate of genetic test activity for breast cancer undertaken in women aged 15 years and

over showed a six-fold variation (ranging from 6.2 to 39.8 per 100,000 population). Potential reasons for variation include differences in the prevalence of inherited breast cancer in different populations, patient preference, test availability, commissioning and differences in local clinical practice.

The Cancer Research UK report, *Molecular diagnostic provision in England*, showed that demand for molecular testing outstripped provision in England by approximately 24,530 tests in 2014. That's 24,530 patients who missed out on the potential benefits of these important tests and may have received sub-optimal treatment.

It is not practical or cost-effective for every hospital to have a molecular laboratory, but it is essential that every hospital has access to a laboratory providing these tests. National commissioning of molecular pathology tests would ensure availability of this vital service across the country.

Recommendation: Nationally commission a molecular diagnostics service to provide uniform, high-quality diagnosis of cancer, irrespective of where patients live or are treated.

Empower patients to manage their own health to stay healthy, manage conditions and to avoid complications

Priority: Deliver the Choosing Wisely initiative

Advances in technology, new procedures and treatments have resulted in a tendency to 'over medicalise' illness.

Choosing Wisely is a campaign that aims to change the way medicine and medical treatments are prescribed. It aims to encourage dialogue between patients and doctors about the value of medical tests, treatments and procedures.

In the US, Canada and Australia, Choosing Wisely has been running successfully for some years, empowering

patients and reducing waste.

Choosing Wisely will foster conversations between doctors and patients, helping people make choices that:

- are supported by evidence
- do not duplicate tests or procedures
- minimise harm
- are truly necessary.

Recommendation: Roll out the Choosing Wisely initiative to support health professionals to have conversations with their patients about the value of tests and treatments, enabling them to make informed choices.

We will drive efficiency and productive investment

Priority: Deliver the National Laboratory Medicine Catalogue (NLMC)

Effective NHS pathology services are the foundation of high quality diagnosis, treatment and care. GPs and hospital doctors rely on accurate and reliable information from pathologists to help them make the right decisions to deliver the best treatments for their patients. However, there is currently no way of requesting and reporting pathology test results in a standardised way across the UK.

To address this, the Royal College of Pathologists, in collaboration with partners, has planned and begun to develop the NLMC. The NLMC would standardise the requesting, reporting and comparison of pathology tests that have been validated for use in the NHS across the UK. This would mean that

hospital doctors, GPs and other health professionals could be certain they are requesting the right test every time and that the results of these tests are comparable with past and future test results.

As well as standardising the results for accurate comparison of tests by healthcare professionals, the NLMC would also make sure that suitable tests are used. It would promote safer and more effective data transfer and collation across healthcare systems. It would reduce ambiguity in both test requests and results, ensuring that communication between laboratories and clinical users is reliable. Essentially, it would mean the right patient gets the interpretation of the right test, at the right time.

Recommendation: The NLMC to be properly funded, supported and implemented across the NHS.

president@rcpath.org

020 7451 6700

©2015 The Royal College of Pathologists

4th Floor, 21 Prescott Street,

London E1 8BB

www.rcpath.org

November 2015