

for help or advice or information, because many of your “customers” do not know what to expect from you and your lab. Tell them how often and when you do those esoteric tests; tell them what significant changes are for patient levels of platelets or zinc; and most importantly, use the complaint as a way to “educate” your customer in the best way to get the best service from your laboratory for the patient. Because that’s why you are there, after all, remember?

Another benefit from documenting your complaints, rather than repairing each problem as you go along, is that you will be able to reflect later on trends. By hauling the file out regularly, say monthly, you will be able to see exactly where and when errors are occurring in you lab, and by matching this with instrument problems and staff rotations, you will be well on the way to performing your own root-cause analysis to discover exactly where you problems come from. And you will then know exactly what you own percentage error rate is – and be well positioned to improve it.

### **Human Error**

I recall once giving a long and detailed lecture on Laboratory Errors. The audience listened intently and politely as I showed slide after slide of problems and mistakes and errors, until the end. A hand at the rear of the lecture hall shot up and a voice said, loudly “But they are all people problems!”

The fact is that people make mistakes – that’s what makes us more interesting than an instrument, in many ways. And at the end of a chain of cause, from error to root source, there is a person. Computers or instruments don’t make mistakes, neither do computer programmes, despite what we may think and say in anger at times. It is the person who wrote the programme, or assembled the actual instrument who made the mistake. If we accept this and plan accordingly, we will be well placed to solve most QC problems and errors.

### **CPD Questions:**

3. **Root cause analysis means investigating a laboratory quality problem to find the real factors causing it,**
  - A) True
  - B) False
4. **Consider some complaints received recently in your own laboratory. Are most of them,**
  - A) trivial,
  - B) opportunities to educate a customer,
  - C) serious, with the subsequent need to change a laboratory procedure.