

Supervision

Supervisors watch how things are done, again to make sure they are done correctly, according to SOPs. I once worked with an excellent supervisor whose first approach when things went wrong was to observe the routine staff doing the test or calibrating the instrument. This simple step is often forgotten, but not by this man. I can still recall him bending over an instrument, his hands behind his back, asking the technologist to “Make it do something.” Of course, he knew how to do that himself, but that was just the point. By observing and supervising, he was able to learn how much the routine staff knew – more useful than showing off what he could still do after all those years “off the bench”.

Monitoring, QC

And now we come to the role of QC in this endeavour, to monitor performance on a regular and consistent basis, by running control samples, both Internal QC and EQA, to allow rational decisions to be made about the quality of performance.

Training

It is not an accident or a typing error that training appears so often in this table. Each step of the way, from selecting an instrument to using QC to monitor its performance, there will be a need for training. And if you think you have finished training, then it time for a re-think. Perhaps you are in the wrong job, or perhaps its time to retire, for training is never finished. That is why we have a system for Continuous Professional Development (CPD), to ensure that we all make effort to keep up with the vast amount of information, ever changing, that affects the way we perform, and ultimately the quality of the service we provide.

One vital area of training is in the maintenance of instruments. There will be plenty of training available at the purchase stage, but this needs to be followed up – you need to maintain instruments as well as push buttons. If you consider that most QC problems can be sourced back to human error, then the lack of proper maintenance must rank up there as one of the most frequent causes of poor performance.

CPD Questions:

6. **Fitness for purpose when buying an instrument means,**
 - A) **Buying the cheapest**
 - B) **Buying the most expensive**
 - C) **Buying the one that does the function needed by you, your staff and your customers**
7. **The purpose of training staff once a new analyzer has been installed is,**
 - A) **To ensure that patient samples are analysed “well”**
 - B) **To make sure the instrument does not break down**
 - C) **To make sure staff feel confident in the use of the new instrument**
 - D) **All of the above**