

QUALITY MATTERS

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You will lose your Chemistry History

If you know this already, don't read any further.

You should all know by now that the cycle of Chemistry EQA that will start in April 2006 will no longer have 26-sample full packs. Instead the largest pack will be 13 samples, to be analysed one every two weeks. We apologise to the few labs still ordering the 26-sample kit, but point out that there are many advantages, such as a much larger database. Where previously, half of our labs were returning results every second week, now every lab will return every week, meaning that the database should be approximately twice what it was. However, as you will all know, there are no free lunches, and thus there are disadvantages. The main one here is that the previous history will not be able to be carried forward. In other words, from week 1 of the next cycle, your Levey-Jennings and percentage Acceptable results will start afresh. We are sorry, but there is no other way, as the re-write required to change from one result every week to one every second week means that we cannot align your old results with your new ones. We recommend that you carefully retain the final report of the current cycle, for accreditation purposes and file it with this important notice.

Traceable Measurements

The chemists are at it again. Never happy when other disciplines catch up with them, such as in QC (did't you know they invented it?), they are off once more, boldly going where no lab man has gone before.

International drives to improve measurement traceability have resulted in a system of primary standards and reference methods being promulgated, with the added need to know our Uncertainty of Measurement (don't know what this? – contact us for an article accepted by SANAS for use locally). The major impact of this will be felt when some labs start calibrating against these almost-available reference materials, available in both Europe and the USA soon. And it will, of course be the chemists first.

From our point of view, we request that anyone changing to a new system of calibration tell us ASAP. Failure to do so will not only warp the stats, but also result in reports comparing your results to an inappropriate database. **KEEP US INFORMED OF ANY CHANGES, PLEASE, PLEASE!**

An example might be the IDMS standard, known as SRM 967, available from NIST.

Mycology & Parasitology

We mentioned in the last QM that these EQAs now carried 2 CPD points each. Sadly, very few labs enrolled in Cycle 2, making it difficult to maintain this service. In fact only 5 labs joined – roughly half of those in Cycle 1, which, of course was free, which tells us something at least. Anyway, unless the numbers increase we will be unable to offer these EQAs again. Enrolments will be requested well ahead of time, for the purposes of evaluating the feasibility. Enrol early if you are interested, otherwise there will be no service in these areas.

Green or Purple?

Those sending us results for albumin on the Chemistry EQA **MUST** make sure they tell us if they are using BCG or BCP reagents. It seems some of you are lingering around in green when you should be in purple – a serious problem with our database, apart from anything else. So, colour match your albumins, **NOW**.

Help!

Our new SOP mentioned some time before is designed to help us help you. To recap, an error on EQA (or anywhere else for that matter) could be an error in your lab, an error at Thistle QA (it happens, it happens) or some problem related to your instrument or reagent (that happens too). If we see an error in your report, we will tackle it systematically. What that means if that many labs have the same error, we will investigate our systems. If we find many labs with the same instrument or reagent have the problem, we will contact the commercial company concerned. But, if the error is in your lab, we will contact you although we can only do this for the worst cases of poor performance. Please note that if you have an active in-house QA Unit, we will offer help through them, the 'official channel'. One of our functions is to try and improve standards and this SOP is part of that drive.

Assistance will be offered confidentially, through our network of Advisory Committees (AdComs) in each laboratory discipline – and we mean confidentially. If you agree to be helped, we will make sure than no one knows who the "poor" lab is. All assistance will be requested and given without anyone knowing who is being helped.

As a first step – make sure you are registered properly. We cannot stress this enough – most problems are due to wrong registrations. So, believe us – the simplest solutions are the best ones to try first if you see a problem.