

QUALITY MATTERS

No 43 February 2008

No more Mr Nice Company!

I've written before that we have been too quick to agree to your requests, for example, to add more tests to an existing EQA. The reason for being so compliant is that it costs us little and pleases our customers. The unfortunate thing, though, is that it often back-fires. Sometimes the constituent levels are the same in every sample and sometimes the data base is way too low. In the recent case of **FRUCTOSAMINE** on the Chemistry EQA, even week samples have a reasonable data base, but odd numbered weeks have only two results, i.e. it is useless. So, to the point: we have tightened up our protocol that covers the introduction of new EQAs and added "changes to present EQAs". This means we will have far more stringent pre-introduction procedures before adding another test. This, I believe, will cut down hassles on both sides – and mean we get fewer complaints for trying to be nice!

Freighting problems – or are they challenges?

This one won't go away. We had high level meetings with our freight people and hope they can solve the problems related to "hot" samples being received in some labs. We are also working to perform more stability tests on our samples and hope to produce a list of those that will work perfectly well with non-ice-packed boxes for a certain period. Again, the hope is to minimise hassles all round.

Changes to Coagulation EQA

From the start of the next cycle in April 2008, the results return sheets will show that PTT will be reported to us as seconds only. We will no longer collect your "reference ranges" or report back you "%MRR" (percentage of the midpoint of your reference range). Not only will this mean we don't have to tramp the country trying to explain how this system works and why we use it – it also means that reports will be easier to understand.

Statistically there will be very little difference for the majority of labs. Labs who established their own reference ranges for PTT, and who had apparent poor performance with "%MRR" will find that their real performance on their Thistle report looks much better!

We are evaluating cooperation with an International Coag EQA, giving us better data base numbers and allowing us to add Factor Assays back onto the programme. There are no free lunches though, and the cost may be higher. There will be lots of communication before this happens though, so watch this space.

Changes to Chemistry from March 2008

Randox are changing the size of the Chemistry EQA vials from 10 ml to 5 ml for the cycle beginning March 2008. The advantages for participants are several. First, the new 5 ml vials will require smaller boxes that will require less storage space and there will be less wastage. For those who pay their own freight, this will obviously cost less; and Randox are considering offering more analytes, thus reducing the cost per analyte on the EQA. We will keep you informed about progress regarding additional analytes – see the section opposite!

The cost of sample manufacturing only makes up a small proportion of the total cost of running an EQA, with a large component being the administration of the scheme and development of the programmes. For this reason the price of the programme will not change.

Changes to Haematology from March 2008

A final reminder that we will be sending out half the cycles worth of samples in March 2008, with the other half sent automatically in June. In addition, the vials will be 2 ml pierce-able, hopefully making sampling and destruction easier.

Enrolments for 2008

All enrolment forms for this year are now ready and waiting for you on our web-site at www.thistle.co.za. Go get 'em!

Albumin BCG or BCP

We are still experiencing problems with laboratory registrations on the Albumin analyte for all relevant chemistry programmes. Please make sure that you are in the correct group. If in doubt, please send your package insert to marlize@thistle.co.za or contact Marlize at Thistle QA for assistance.

By Dr Jim McCulloch