

QUALITY MATTERS

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Stability of COAGULATION material

We are repeating our stability testing using careful temperature measurement and using two types of assessments, namely: a) stability of material we use in our kits, by simulating a “freight problem” – basically, how long the material can be exposed to high temperatures and still “work” satisfactorily, and b) how long after reconstitution it can be used – basically, how long you can keep it after reconstitution before it is “vrot”.

- a) The material worked well for coagulation assays when exposed to temperatures of up to 34°C for up to 6 days. This should cover even the worst freight disasters.
- b) If stored at 4°C, the material can be used for up to 4 hours after reconstitution. This should be time to fix that instrument problem before testing your EQA.

Both of these stabilities will be mentioned on instruction sheets from the next cycle of Coagulation EQA.

Method and Factor Changes

We receive a constant stream of requests to change factors, methods and instruments on our various EQA programmes. Of course we have systems in place to do this carefully and with plenty of checking. But we sometimes get an over-the-top request, to change factors and / or methods dating back a complete cycle. We can no longer just say “yes” without compromising the data base for all those labs not changing factors etc. As a consequence, we will only change factors, units and methods for current results or future ones – we will not “back-correct” these matters. We recommend that you apply any changes to your report manually and keep these records for SANAS assessment purposes.

Another Party at Thistle QA – free booze and food

We have expanded our offices and are currently renovating, changing colour schemes etc. once this is done, we’ll have another wee re-opening, to show off our trendy new offices. Same old faces, but a new décor at least.

International data base on Chemistry

A recent count showed that local labs account for about 16% of the Chemistry EQA data base, making Thistle QA a truly “international-local” supplier of EQAs. The rest of the results come from over 60 countries.

New fax machine and fax to email

Our new fax machine has been installed, and hopefully fax errors will decrease or – we can dream – disappear all together. So far there have been no notifications of “but we sent our results, why have we got a ‘no return’ on our reports” – a frustrating thing for all concerned. HOWEVER we will watch this closely in the future – and have a back-up plan, where we have set up fax to email phone numbers. So, if the problem persists, ask us for one of these numbers. We’ll then do some trials with the lab or labs concerned and solve it, once and for all.

Persistent Poor Performance (PPP)

We have a system for identifying those labs whose poor performance is persistent. These PPP labs will receive a letter from us offering help. This might simply be a discussion about factors or slopes or registration changes. But it might be technical help, if required. Please don’t be frightened if you receive one of these letters. We are merely trying to be proactive and helpful – and you are not being reported to anyone! We just want to help, OK!

Cholinesterase

This analyte will not be part of the Chemistry EQA anymore. After lots of chatting and checking we have decided to dump this one. The numbers are too low and the stats obtained are not good enough. This will be done at the end of this current Chemistry cycle 38.

Expansion of Thistle programmes

We are working very hard on current programmes that we feel needs a bit of revamping. Keep your ears and eyes open for communication regarding this. The immediate programmes involved are Serology, Food Micro, and Microbiology. We are looking at international material and report changes. Hopefully more programmes will be international and this means bigger data bases and higher quality stats. It can happen that when a programme is changed you might lose your stat history. Not much we can do about that – most of the time these programme changes are reprogrammed, and the differences too big to copy stats over.

By Dr Jim McCulloch