

**Maintaining Quality in FMH testing without access to EQA material 12/08/2020**

**Background**

During the COVID-19 pandemic UK NEQAS BTLP has been unable to access any fresh cord material to use for the preparation of its FMH EQA samples. As a result of this we have been unable to distribute the last two FMH exercises (2003F and 2004F).

A number of people have contacted the scheme to discuss the issue of how laboratories can assure the quality of their results without EQA material; there have also been anecdotal references to this having been commented on by UKAS assessors.

**Ways that laboratories could assure results without access to EQA.**

1. Performing a risk assessment regarding the absence of EQA performance monitoring; the risk assessment will need to be individual to each laboratory, but could include mitigating factors such as:
  - a. Previous performance in EQA exercises
  - b. The use of control samples

The risks will be different depending on whether your laboratory performs screening only or quantification and whether you refer samples with positive results.

2. Sample sharing – fetal cell counts performed on the same patient sample in separate laboratories
  - a. This would also fulfil UKAS requirements for comparability.
  - b. This could be organised by sample sharing between laboratories within the same organisation or by agreement between different service providers.  
**Note agreement on sharing patient samples between separate institutions may require ethical approval through each organisation's ethics committee, Caldicott guardian or equivalent.**
3. Producing 'specific' bleed volumes in-house and then processing as if EQA samples
  - a. UK NEQAS have a method for calculating how much cord sample to add to a set volume of adult sample, to get a specific bleed volume.
  - b. UK NEQAS can send a spreadsheet which contains brief instructions and is designed to make the calculation simple. Please email us at [BTLP@ukneqas.org.uk](mailto:BTLP@ukneqas.org.uk) if you would like a copy of the spreadsheet including your laboratory's PRN in your email.
    - i. All that is required is a haematocrit on both cord and adult samples together with the amount of adult sample to be used.
    - ii. Please note that create small volume bleeds the volume of adult cells needs to be sufficient to ensure that the amount of cord added can be accurately measured.

**Continued overleaf**

**Future exercises**

In order to fulfil the obligations of the scheme in terms of performance assessment the intention is to increase the number of samples in the remaining distributions during the 2020 / 21 period. This was approved by the UK NEQAS BTLP Steering Committee, and the National Quality Assurance Advisory Panel (NQAAP) for Haematology has been made aware of this.

We are hopeful that we can now obtain enough cord material to allow us to restart the FMH exercises in September, with exercise 2005F being distributed as planned on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

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