

SSMLT Position Paper

Point-of-Care Testing

Miniaturization and other technological advances have made it possible to provide certain laboratory tests in direct patient care areas such as the hospital ward or treatment unit, community clinics, physician offices and in some cases the patient's home. Under controlled circumstances, point-of-care testing can contribute to cost-effective and appropriate care by providing timely diagnostic laboratory data. The SSMLT endorses point-of-care testing where it enhances patient care and is under the supervision of qualified medical laboratory technologists.

All health care professionals involved in the delivery of point-of-care testing (POCT) must work together as a team to develop a POCT service that provides safe, effective, quality analysis. The analysis provided is a valuable tool that enables physicians and other health care providers to make informed decisions regarding the patient's diagnosis and treatment. It is essential that POCT be performed with the same commitment to quality as testing that is performed within the laboratory. We must ensure that quality is not compromised and that patient outcomes are improved when POCT is implemented.

The Laboratory Quality Assurance Program of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan has established the following Quality Assurance Policy regarding POCT:

To ensure quality patient care, the laboratory must be given responsibility for:

- *Evaluation and selection of instrumentation and procedures*
- *Training and certification of non-laboratory personnel*
- *Establishment of quality control protocols*
- *Test protocols, equipment maintenance, and troubleshooting records*
- *Protocols for test requisitioning and result reporting*
- *Setting up policies regarding instrument maintenance and supplies*

A successful POCT program requires a coordinated, multi-disciplinary effort and must be addressed with a progressive attitude. POCT must be regarded as part of the effective laboratory medical care in the hospital. The advantages of POCT for patients, physicians, nurses and laboratory personnel will become apparent only if everyone involved works closely together. The need for an absolute assurance of quality is immediate. In the long term, POCT must demonstrate that it does, truly improve patient outcomes.