NZ Cytopathology Individual External Quality Assurance Programme: Policy and Processes

Objective

The individual External Quality Assurance (EQA) programme is an education-based independent survey for all New Zealand Cytoscientists, Cytotechnicians and Cytopathologists. Participation in both the EQA and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes provides supporting evidence of an individual's ongoing competency to report gynaecological cytopathology. The RCPAQAP provides the EQA under contract to the Ministry of Health's National Cervical Screening Programme (NCSP).

Enrolment

At the beginning of each year, the RCPAQAP Cytopathology Program Manager liaises with laboratory moderators to confirm individual enrolments for the year. Laboratories are able to enroll in either the ThinPrep or SurePath option. Enrolments are processed by the RCPAQAP enrolment office. All cytopathologists, cytoscientists and cytotechnicians who report gynaecological cytology results must be enrolled in the programme. While any Registrars working within participating laboratories are welcome to take part in the surveys for their own interest and education, they should not be enrolled in this EQA program.

Case Selection

Liquid-based cervical smears are selected from the existing slide library used for routine RCPAQAP slide surveys. The slide library contains slides donated by members of the RCPAQAP Cytopathology Advisory Committee as well as participating laboratories. The RCPAQAP slide library has been established for many years, and slides are constantly being added or removed. Maintenance of the slide library and ensuring slides are of optimal quality is a continuous and important role of RCPAQAP staff.

Selected cases comprise diagnoses which include normal findings, pathogens, premalignant conditions and neoplasia, both squamous and glandular. All epithelial abnormalities are histologically confirmed. All donated slides undergo rigorous re-screening by program staff prior to being accepted to the slide library. Most slides have a documented 'slide history' representing previous participant responses recorded in the laboratory based EQA provided by the RCPAQAP. Slide histories provide further evidence that the diagnostic entity is well represented on the slide.

Laboratory Moderator

The laboratory moderator is nominated by each of the participating laboratories and is responsible for the co-ordination of the program in each laboratory. The laboratory moderator must:

- Unpack the slides - it is the responsibility of the moderator to unpack the survey material and distribute the slides and answer sheets appropriately.
- Acknowledge the survey material - the Acknowledgement of Survey Material form must be completed and signed at each stage by the moderator. By signing the acknowledgement, the laboratory moderator certifies that to the best of his/her knowledge, all individuals participating in the program have reviewed the

slides as individuals and no collaboration between participants has occurred. Consensus diagnosis is not appropriate in individual EQA.

- Recording non-participation - moderators must record participants who are enrolled, but did not submit responses for the survey. Moderators should note the reason for any individual's non-participation.
- Pack and transfer slide sets - when all staff have reviewed the slides and provided a completed Answer Sheet, both slide sets must be re-packed carefully using the packing material provided and forwarded to the next laboratory on the distribution schedule. The distribution schedule is also signed before forwarding to the next laboratory.
- Distribution of survey reports and photosheets to individual participants in their laboratory. These are provided by the RCPAQAP at the end of each survey.

Distribution Schedule

The program consists of two surveys of 5 slides each and there is one set of slides for cytologists (unmarked) and another set of slides for cytopathologists (marked). Surveys are distributed approximately during May and August. Laboratories are permitted to keep the slides for two weeks during which time slides are examined by individual participants. The moderator must sign the schedule on receipt of slides and when slides are dispatched to the next laboratory. The distribution schedule remains with the survey material and should be returned by the last laboratory to the RCPAQAP Office.

Answer Sheets

Answer sheets including diagnostic codes and assessment categories are modelled on those used in the current RCPAQAP laboratory gynaecological modules. Each slide must be answered with a single diagnostic code. Tick boxes indicating the presence/absence of endocervical cells, the satisfactory nature of the smear and recommendations for patient follow up, must be completed by participants. Completed answer sheets are returned to the laboratory moderator, who returns them directly to the RCPAQAP.

Individual Reports

A Result Sheet comprising individual responses and containing assessment of the slide diagnoses, is provided to individual participants at the end of the survey. Assessment is based on the Classification of Diagnostic Codes – refer RCPAQAP document QF-CY-02.

The expected response is the target diagnosis as defined by the RCPAQAP Cytopathology Advisory Committee. The committee has agreed that there may be a range of acceptable responses for each slide. Response classifications are as follows:-

1. *Target response*: an exact match with the expected (panel) diagnosis.
2. *Acceptable response:* not an exact match, but a diagnosis that would not result in an adverse patient outcome.
3. *Unacceptable response*: a response which is considered to be a significant deviation from the panel diagnosis but not a major error.
4. *Major error:* A significant deviation from the panel diagnosis that may have a significant adverse effect on patient management.

The classifications ‘target’ and ‘acceptable’ may be considered together for the statistical purposes.

Photosheets containing photomicrographs depicting pertinent morphological features are provided with each survey. These provide an educational aspect to the program and are posted to the myQAP portal and this link is provided to moderators for distribution to all participants.

Laboratory Reports

A Laboratory Report is also provided to each medical director and moderator. This report summarises the results for every participant in each laboratory. Individual participants are de-identified in this report.

Survey and Annual Reports

A survey report is compiled at the end of each survey by the Program Manager and authorised by the Program Chair. This report summaries all responses and outlines the results for each survey. Results are tabulated individually for cytopathologists, cytoscientists/technicians, ThinPrep and Surepath as well as for each of the individual laboratories. Any issues relating to the surveys are discussed in the report. The Annual Report combines the results of both surveys into one report.

Certificates of Participation

Certificates are distributed with the second survey of the year and indicate whether the participant has provided responses for each survey. The NCSP Policies and Standards, Section 5: Providing a Laboratory Service mandates participation in the EQA program for all cytopathologists, cytoscientists and cytotechnicians reporting gynaecological cytology.

Assessment of Individual Performance

The primary focus of the program is educational and participation in the program provides supporting evidence of maintenance and further development of competency at an individual level.

A spreadsheet of the cumulative results for each participant is maintained by the RCPAQAP and shared with the NCSP. This spreadsheet identifies the laboratory by name, but each participant remains anonymous. The NCSP and the RCPAQAP will monitor participant responses and non-participation.

In the event that a participant records a major error or three unacceptable responses, the RCPAQAP will send a letter and an action sheet (see templates below) to the participant. The action sheet should be completed by the participant and submitted (anonymously if the participant wishes) to their laboratory moderator, who will keep a record of this action sheet. This record will be made available for review by the NCSP on request. This process will be repeated for each major error made by a participant.

Participants who do not participate in the survey, and do not provide an adequate explanation for their non-participation, will also be sent a letter by the RCPAQAP which reminds them of the requirement to participate in the EQA programme.

If the NCSP has concerns about an individual's ongoing performance in the EQA programme, the NCSP will meet with the relevant laboratory moderator and medical directors (or a nominated alternative if necessary) to check completion of the action sheets, and discuss how the laboratory is supporting the participant.

Where the NCSP has ongoing concern about a participant, it may take advice on how to proceed from the pathologists and cytoscientists on the NCSP Advisory Group. If there is a conflict of interest for the NCSP Advisory Group members, then other laboratory representatives (such as previous Advisory Group members or laboratory Quality Managers) may be consulted by the NCSP. The identity of the participant would remain anonymous to the Advisory Group members and any other laboratory representative consulted by the NCSP.

Donation of Cases

The RCPAQAP relies solely on donations of slides from participating laboratories in order to provide high quality material for the surveys. Laboratories participating in this program are required to donate LBC cases in triplicate where possible. Refer RCPAQAP document number QF-CY-40.

<<date>>
<<Laboratory Address>>

Participant No << xxx>>

Individual External Quality Assurance Program

Slide Survey IC14SUP1: Slide No <<xxxxx>>

Target response: <<xxxxx>>

Your response: <<xxxxx>>

Dear Participant,

The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia Quality Assurance Program (RCPAQAP) is contracted to the Ministry of Health to provide an Individual External Quality Assurance (EQA) programme to staff of each laboratory currently reporting gynaecological cytology in New Zealand. While the main focus of the program is educational, participation in this EQA provides supporting evidence of maintenance and further development of competency at an individual level.

It is noted that your results for Survey x <<year>> include a major error/ x unacceptable responses. Please find attached an action sheet for you to complete and return to your laboratory moderator as a record. The action sheet may be returned anonymously to your laboratory moderator if you prefer.

If you require assistance or would like to discuss this further, please contact us at the RCPAQAP Cytopathology.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely

A/Prof Margaret Cummings
RCPA Cytopathology QAP Program Chair
cytopathology@rcpaqap.com.au

Cytopathology Individual External Quality Assurance Program
Action Sheet

Participant number: ……

Your results for Survey Number xxx contained 1 major error/ x unacceptable responses.

Target response	Your response

Please take at least 30 minutes to review material or slides relating to the target response(s) for which you have recorded a major error. Please indicate what action you have taken, and provide details below (for example what material you reviewed, and how long you spent reviewing):

□ Photomicrographs reviewed. Please provide details:

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□ References read. Please provide details:

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□ Teaching slides reviewed. Please provide details:

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□ Reviewed and discussed slides with a colleague. Please provide details:

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□ Other. Please provide details:

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Once complete, please sign below and provide a copy of this action sheet to the Quality Assurance Programme moderator in your laboratory.

Signature …….. Date ……