Guidelines for the Accreditation of Laboratories for Training in Immunopathology

Introduction

There are three main paths for training in Immunology in Australasia: (i) advanced training in Clinical Immunology–Allergy, supervised by the joint specialist advisory committee (JSAC) of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP); (ii) combined advanced training in Clinical Immunology–Allergy as well as Immunopathology, jointly supervised by the RACP and the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA); and (iii) training in Immunopathology only, under the sole supervision of the RCPA. The first two paths require a successful part I in the RACP, whilst the third may be entered directly after internship. In all cases, training is undertaken prospectively under the guidance of a specified supervisor at each training site. It is the responsibility of the Colleges to ensure that sites that seek to provide advanced training are of an acceptable quality.

Accreditation guidelines for advanced training in Clinical Immunology–Allergy are available as a separate document from the RACP. The current document outlines minimum criteria for accreditation of laboratories seeking to supervise advanced trainees in Immunopathology for either the Joint (RACP/RCPA) program or the RCPA one.

The process of training site inspection of laboratories for Immunopathology training is designed to ensure the highest standards of training in this discipline. Sites will be assessed for their capacity to provide opportunities for trainees to obtain the requisite level of expertise, in part or full, towards becoming a specialist Immunopathologist, and the inspection process will ensure similar standards are met in all training sites.

The Purpose behind the Accreditation of Sites

The accreditation process will provide the Joint Specialist Advisory Committee (JSAC) and the Board of Censors (BOC) with important information on the facilities, level of supervision, laboratory throughput, clinical workload (if applicable), educational opportunities and infrastructure available at each training site. This will allow the application of minimum criteria to each site to help determine the duration of training and the number of trainees that can realistically be accommodated, and will provide training sites with constructive feedback on how they may improve the training experience. The information gained during this process will also help trainees choose sites that will be appropriate to their training requirements.

The Accreditation Process

A site seeking accreditation for advanced training must demonstrate that it has suitable supervision, staff, laboratory throughput, breadth of testing and infrastructure available. This will be assessed according to five standards with criteria listed relating to each standard (see below). Each standard must be met before the site will be accredited. Documentation for each criterion will be required.

A training site must be able to provide at least 12 months of training in order to be considered suitable for accreditation. The maximum period a site can be accredited for laboratory training is 4 years for RCPA-only training, and 2 years for Joint training. Based on the diversity of laboratory activities within the discipline of Immunopathology, some sites may be accredited for shorter periods. RCPA-only trainees must spend at least 12 months at an alternate site during their Immunopathology training unless specifically exempted by the Chief Examiner (CEX) or BOC; this restriction does not apply to the 2 years core laboratory training in a Joint training program, where clinical attachments and RACP-supervised basic training are deemed to satisfy the RCPA rotation policy.

Immunology/Allergy Advanced Training Site Accreditation Form

The "Application for accreditation as an advanced training site in Immunopathology" will be sent to all potential Immunopathology training sites twice during each 5-year accreditation cycle, one of which will be immediately prior to the inspection. These surveys will be reviewed by the Chief examiner in Immunopathology (CEX), and provisional accreditation based on the Standards and Criteria listed below may be given. Such accreditation is provisional for a maximum of 12 months, and subject to a formal site visit, but will allow a training site to recruit a trainee with the assurance that his/her training will be accredited for at least 12 months; a formal site visit would however normally occur in the first year that such a trainee is recruited.

The inspector

Inspection of laboratories for Immunopathology training will be undertaken by the chief examiner in Immunopathology or his/her delegate. Where sites wish to offer Joint training, inspection visits will be co-ordinated with the JSAC where feasible. In the latter case, at least one member of the JSAC inspection team will hold an FRCPA in Immunopathology.

Site Visits

Training Site Inspection visits by the CEX will be arranged at a time convenient for the laboratory staff, the Head of the Immunopathology Unit and any trainees who are employed. Availability of the trainee is mandatory hence sites will be visited only when there is a current trainee at that site who has had sufficient time in the position to give feedback on his/her experience. The RCPA State Councillor will be invited to attend should s/he so wish.

During the site visit, the training site will be assessed according to the Standards and Criteria (see below). This will involve an initial interview with the Director of the Immunopathology Department, but the focus of the visit will be on the trainee interview where details of the training experience during the attachment will be determined. A formal inspection of the laboratory facilities with the trainee will follow. Preliminary feedback to the department will be given immediately after the inspection, to which all immunopathologists are invited, and will be followed by a report written by the CEX. The report will detail the training currently offered at the site, any unsatisfactory aspects of the training site that require immediate remediation, recommendations pertaining to improvements that could be made, and finally whether accreditation is granted. This will include a recommendation on the duration of training based on the breadth of immunopathological experience offered, along with specification of the maximum number of trainees that can be accommodated. A draft report will then be sent to the site personnel, including the trainee, for correction of factual errors, and a final report will be sent to the BOC for ratification. In the case of Joint training, the final report will also be sent to the TSAC (subcommittee of the JSAC).

Sites should be aware that a visit conducted for assessment of clinical training does not imply accreditation of laboratory training and vice versa.

If accreditation is withdrawn at a site where a trainee has been employed on the basis of an approved accreditation survey, that trainee's training should nevertheless be accredited for that year (and only that year) unless their training experience has been severely compromised.

All costs related to the site visits will be met by the RCPA. In the case of a joint visit with the JSAC, costs will be shared between the Colleges. Attempts should be made to co-ordinate the timing of site visits to coincide with meetings/other events to be held close to the training sites.

Appeals Process

If a site does not gain laboratory accreditation, it may request a review of the decision by the BOC. If the BOC upholds the decision, the applicants may appeal the decision through the RCPA appeals process.

Continuing Accreditation

Accreditation will in general stand for 5 years following a site visit, but this may be shorter if there are perceived deficiencies in the training site, or concerns regarding impending changes. Accredited laboratories must notify the CEX of any change of circumstances within their facilities which may lead to their failing to meet the minimum criteria for accreditation, including any proposed increase in the number of trainees. Failure to notify the change in status may result in withdrawal of accreditation. A second accreditation form will be sent to the laboratory within the 5-year cycle, which will provide a failsafe for ensuring that standards are maintained.

Overseas Training

Training obtained overseas is acceptable, provided the proposed training site meets the accreditation criteria. Overseas training sites will be assessed on information provided by the trainee's supervisor on a completed survey form. Formal inspection of overseas training sites by the CEX is not required.

Requirements and Criteria for Accreditation of Advanced Training Sites

Requirement 1

The training site will provide adequate supervision for advanced training.

Criteria

- The training site must have a qualified Immunopathologist who is accessible at all times, and should ideally be on-site in a full-time capacity, but a minimum of 0.5 FTE. In the latter circumstance, a delegated senior scientist or other pathologist should be available to fulfil supervision obligations when off-site. There should be similar cover for annual and study leave of the supervisor. The availability of supervision should be commensurate with the number of trainees. This would normally constitute at least 0.5 FTE Immunopathologist per trainee.

- The supervisor will:
    - ensure that the trainee is involved in the daily running of the laboratory;
    - ensure that the trainee gains experience in all aspects of the discipline, including interpretation of laboratory tests, verification of laboratory tests, quality assurance and teaching activities;
    - meet regularly with the trainee to provide feedback on progress;
    - be available to deal with problems in the laboratory and ensure that the trainee is not placed in a position of practising beyond their competence.

Requirement 2

The training site will have sufficient workload and diversity of laboratory testing.

Criteria

- The service will offer satisfactory sample throughput to facilitate experience in the breadth of case material covered in the Immunopathology syllabus, including but not limited to:
    - Autoimmune serology (ANAs, ENAs, dsDNA, ANCA, tissue autoantibodies, RF, CCP etc)
    - Immunochemistry (EPGs, IFEs, nephelometry, precipitins etc)
    - Complement assays
    - Allergy tests (IgE, specific IgE, tryptase, ECP)
    - Lymphocyte subset enumeration (T, B, NK, HLA-B27)
    - Immunophenotyping of blood, bone marrow and tissue samples (eg for lymphoma, leukaemia, myeloma)
    - Direct immunofluorescence of skin and renal biopsies
    - Lymphocyte function testing (proliferation assays, expression assays, interferon-gamma release assays)
    - Tests for HIV infection
    - Neutrophil function tests
    - HLA testing
- Where the breadth of the syllabus cannot be covered, the service will facilitate rotation of the trainee to other laboratories where these tests can be offered. Duration of maximum accreditation may be shortened if limited laboratory experience is offered at a given site, and if this is deemed to be too limited, accreditation may be withdrawn completely.

Requirement 3

The training site will provide a suitable resources and opportunities for training.

Criteria

- The service will be accredited by independent laboratory accreditation bodies, eg NATA;
- The trainee should be integrated into the laboratory workflow as much as possible, and this should be reflected in the quality documentation of the laboratory.
- The service will ensure that opportunities are available for the trainee to regularly attend scheduled inter-disciplinary clinical/pathology meetings. The trainee should present and discuss selected laboratory cases at these meetings. The trainee will participate in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching where possible;
- The service will provide access to educational materials via the Internet, including on-line journals and search facilities. Alternatively, a medical library with current textbooks, journals, and access to computerised databases should be available;
- The service will involve the trainee in routine internal and external quality assurance activities.

Requirement 4

The trainee will receive formal training in Immunopathology.

Criteria

- The service will run an in-house education program in Immunopathology;
- The service will provide opportunities for the trainee to present educational topics to other staff members.
- The service will allow the trainee to attend appropriate courses in Immunopathology (eg RCPA Pathology Update meeting in March, ICPMR course in May), or other scientific meetings of equivalent educational value.

Requirement 5

The service should have suitable research facilities.

Criteria

- The service should have an active research program in which the trainee can participate, either within the diagnostic service or in basic immunobiology;
- The trainee will be involved in at least one research project during their training, but not necessarily in every year of that training;
- The service will provide an active program (through meetings, journal clubs etc) where trainees can learn critical appraisal of research papers.

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