

## Guideline

**Subject: Transfer of specimens between different pathology providers for pathology testing at clinician request**

Approval Date: July 2013, July 2017, August 2019

Review Date: August 2022

Review By: BPPQ

Number: 2/2013

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This document aims to give guidance to source laboratories (Laboratory A) and testing laboratories (Laboratory B) regarding transfer of a patient's sample(s) held by Laboratory A for which a request has been made by a treating Doctor to transfer the specimen(s) to Laboratory B for testing.

Archiving of samples is a NPAAC requirement for a number of pathology specialities as part of the services provided, e.g. tissue blocks. One major purpose of archiving is to enable testing at a later date in the course of clinical care. As a consequence, the retrieval of archived material from one laboratory to transfer to another for further testing should be timely so that patient management is not impacted. Fees for providing this retrieval service are MBS rebatable in Australia<sup>1</sup>.

Requesting clinicians, in consultation with the patient, use their clinical knowledge of the disease and familiarity with individual laboratories to select the most appropriate test(s) and where these should be performed. This is based on the expertise within any given laboratory and precise performance characteristics of the test, its methodology, specificity and sensitivity together with positive and negative predictive values. Thus, the apparent same test used in different laboratories may not be equivalent, which explains the well-recognised observation that some tests performed by laboratories that differ in these domains give different results. This is irrespective of laboratories complying with activities required for NATA/RCPA accreditation and further supports the rationale for clinicians to select the tests that most suit their patient needs in their specific clinical context.

Most tests requested by a clinician are performed and interpreted together in a single laboratory.

Not all tests are provided by all laboratories and samples are therefore frequently sent out by these laboratories (as a send away) to external laboratories accredited in the test.

Clinicians may, on a single request form, require pathology testing to be done at one or more laboratories.

Clinicians may also request samples previously tested and held in one laboratory for additional testing by another laboratory (refer to the NPAAC standard for intra laboratory referral), e.g. molecular testing. The archiving of a patient's specimen at a particular laboratory does not confer any proprietary interest in that tissue for the laboratory to perform any subsequent testing required, except if it be specifically requested to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> Laboratories should consider the impact of any gap fee on the seriously ill patient before charging above the MBS item.

In order to facilitate the transfer of specimens required for testing between laboratories for optimal patient care, the College provides the following guideline, based on the following scenarios:

- A clinician has sent a referral to Laboratory A but has requested some of the tests to be performed at Laboratory B. Laboratory A should transfer some of the sample to Laboratory B and it may claim the MBS item for the provision of this transfer service.
- The clinician has sent a request directly to Laboratory B but the specimen is held at Laboratory A. Laboratory B requests the release of tissues from Laboratory A so that it can test the sample. Laboratory A should send the relevant specimen to Laboratory B and it may claim the MBS item for the provision of this transfer service.

Laboratory A should not proceed to test the specimen unless there are exceptional circumstances and in this event Laboratory A needs to first communicate with the referring clinician to ensure that both the clinician and patient agree, negotiate a separate request form from the referring clinician and inform Laboratory B. Further, Laboratory A needs to disclose to the referring clinician the method of testing to be used and what (if any) are its limitations so that the referring clinician may appropriately interpret the result from Laboratory A.

Where Laboratory A has either

- the original request form for the original pathology undertaken, or
- a mere copy of the new clinical request form nominating Laboratory B as the testing laboratory,

this is not sufficient for the purposes of proceeding to perform the new test in house.

MBS rebate from 1 May 2019

<b>Group P5—Tissue pathology</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Service</b>	<b>Fee (\$)</b>
72860	Retrieval and review of archived formalin fixed paraffin embedded block(s) to determine the appropriate sample(s) for the purpose of conducting genetic testing	85.00