

Collection and Labeling of Patient Specimens – SAMPLE

Principle:

A critical step in laboratory testing is ensuring the correct test result is assigned to the correct patient. Best practices for laboratory specimen labeling follow strict guidelines that include the use of two patient identifiers and the labeling of every specimen in the presence of the patient. Incorrect patient identification and wrong labels applied to specimens can result in adverse patient outcomes (e.g. incorrect diagnosis, incorrect treatment).

Procedure:

A. Initial Collection

1. Identify the patient by using two patient identifiers to ensure the correct specimen is being collected from the correct patient.
2. Label each specimen container and form in the direct presence of the patient at the time of collection.
3. Label each container using two patient identifiers (e.g., patient name and date of birth).
4. Include date, time, and the initials of the person collecting the specimen.
5. For those specimens with laterality or site specification (for example two skin biopsies samples taken for the same testing), clearly label the specimen without the use of abbreviations.
6. Do NOT pre-label specimens.
7. Do NOT re-label an incorrectly labeled specimen (unless it is an irreplaceable specimen).

B. Irreplaceable specimens

1. Irreplaceable specimens are defined as any specimens obtained through an invasive or surgical procedure (e.g. body fluids, cerebral spinal fluid, bone marrows, and surgical specimens).
2. If a labeling error has occurred, notify the physician immediately. Work with the physician and laboratory facility on the necessary steps required for identifying these specimens. Include a disclaimer on the report regarding potential identification error.

C. Storage and handling

1. Adhere to the appropriate storage and transport of specimens following laboratory guidelines.
2. Establish a specimen identification log or an electronic system that tracks specimens when they are sent to an outside laboratory.
3. Follow up on results not received within an established timeframe

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D. Specimen Errors

1. Collect a new specimen when it has been identified a specimen has been improperly collected, labeled, transported, or stored.
2. Do NOT re-label an incorrectly labeled specimen.
3. Report the specimen error following the office practice policy for incident reports.
4. Track all specimen errors, identify opportunities for improvement, and implement system changes as necessary.
5. Document all rejected specimens and irreplaceable specimens received that do not meet established criteria in the Monthly Quality Assurance report. Review the report for trends, corrective actions, or quality improvement initiatives implemented.

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