

# **The Path Review** **Northern Ireland 2004**

*The purpose of this newsletter is to provide information to all HPSS laboratory personnel and to encourage staff to make suggestions and put forward comments and ideas that are relevant to the Pathology Review process. This is your review and we want to hear from you!*

## **A View from the Chair – Dame Prof Ingrid Allen**

*A few months ago I was sitting in my cosy office cum laboratory in the Medical Biology Centre at Queen's when the Chief Medical Officer phoned to ask if I would consider chairing the board that would oversee a review of Laboratory Medicine in Northern Ireland. I agreed, thinking that this would mean turning up at a few meetings, getting through an agenda, and agreeing the minutes. In fact it has turned out to be a much more interesting exercise.*



*Early on it was decided that we should visit every laboratory in Northern Ireland. This decision was undoubtedly the right one. Not only have I had the chance to visit laboratories old and new, to see old friends, and make new ones, but together with members of the project team we have had the opportunity to see working conditions at first hand and to recognise general and site-specific difficulties, in spite of which the service is delivered effectively.*

***“This review is proving to be a process. We are being challenged by, and forced to think about, options that we never bothered considering before”.***

*The dedication of the project team has been tremendous and under Louise Skelly's leadership, several members of the team have been present at each visit. Visits have been enjoyable, giving us the opportunity to refresh our knowledge not only of laboratories, but of the Ulster countryside. Few of us will forget the long line of cars, allegedly breaking the speed limit on unknown “B” roads between Omagh and Enniskillen!*

*The important issues which we have learned about at first hand will be discussed in the interim report which all will have the opportunity to see. What has also come across to us is the high quality and dedication of HPSS laboratory medicine staff. We could not have a better basis on which to carry forward any necessary reforms.*

*One concern, which has been expressed several times, is that our final report may not be carried forward into an implementation plan. However, the Department has assured us that there will be an implementation plan after the final report has been agreed.*

*One distinguished pathologist on one of our site visits said “This review is proving to be a process. We are being challenged by, and forced to think about, options that we never bothered considering before”. This to me was one of the most refreshing comments I have heard. I am convinced that given the vision of HPSS laboratory medicine staff and the desire of the Department to implement agreed recommendations, we can have a gold-standard model of laboratory medicine of which one can be justly proud.*

*Let's go for it!*

**Details of all aspects of the Review are on the DHSSPS Website:**  
[http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hss/clinical\\_pathology/index.asp](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hss/clinical_pathology/index.asp)

## Review under way

During April 2003 the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Henrietta Campbell announced her intention to commission a review of laboratories in Northern Ireland. This review is now well underway and will provide the Department of Health with a plan for strengthening and developing pathology laboratory services, responsive to the needs of the patients and users.

The reasons for a review at this time are many but include the plans for reconfiguring hospitals in Northern Ireland, the potential for collaboration between laboratories, issues raised by the Public Accounts Committee and the new contract for GPs. It may surprise some that the last review was over twenty years ago!

### The Review will consider:

- **The requirements of primary and community care, and hospitals;**
- **The need for cost effective pathology services;**
- **Developments in clinical practice and new technologies;**
- **Staffing implications;**
- **Quality issues;**
- **Capital resource requirements, (buildings, equipment and IT);**
- **Teaching and training;**
- **Research and development; and**
- **Management and governance arrangements.**



### The Project Board & Project Team



*A selection of the Review Team meeting at the Antrim Hospital, from left: Bertie Kennedy, Dept of Health, Louise Skelly, project Manager, Brian Magee, Craigavon and Dr Maurice O'Kane Altnagelvin.*

**The Project Team** includes individuals from across the spectrum of Clinical Pathology with the conviction that the pathology service in Northern Ireland could be delivered more effectively than it is at present.

The Team is made up of eight individuals who are responsible for collecting as much pertinent information as possible to inform the review process and to develop proposals for consideration by the Project Board. Others not shown in the photograph are Helen Allen, (BLL), Geoff Kennedy (United Hospitals), Peter Auld, (BLL) and Dr Miriam McCarthy (DHSSPS).

The Review team meets about once a fortnight and reports back to the **Project Board**, which is chaired by Dame Ingrid Allen.

The Board meets bi-monthly to provide overall guidance and direction to the project. A full list of all on the Project Board can be found on the Department's Website at [http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hss/clinical\\_pathology/whoswho.asp](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hss/clinical_pathology/whoswho.asp).

*"I'm all for progress, It's change I can't stand"* attrib Mark Twain

## Lab Visits and Mono-discipline Focus Groups

The visiting of all pathology laboratories in Northern Ireland was an invaluable exercise giving the review team first hand access to staff and concurrently giving staff access to the review team. The team had opportunity to see what strengths each laboratory had as well as weaknesses; it gave an opportunity for personnel to share some of the problems they face on a daily basis. Mono-discipline meetings followed the site visits to determine what staff felt was actually necessary and sustainable in pathology provision in their own field; each discipline has its own unique dynamic.

The mono-discipline groups met at Greenmount College in Antrim and consisted of key members of each of the disciplines providing pathology services in Northern Ireland. These two sets of meetings have been the most visible part of the review process but a substantial amount of information has been gathered from a great variety of sources. Some of the issues highlighted include:

- **An inadequate computer system** – need for good IT capable of delivering across all boundaries;
- **Pressures on the workforce** –European Working Time Directive compliance and filling key posts;
- **The potential for further cross-Trust working;**
- **The increasing needs of primary care** – especially with the new GP contracts;
- **Viability of laboratory buildings** – including lack of space;
- **Impact of the development of molecular biological technology;**
- **Management of point-of-care testing;**
- **Teaching, research and development;**
- **Location and workload of mortuary services;**
- **Lack of consultant cover** – a particular problem in a number of locations; and
- **Lack of CPA accreditation**

These problems are likely to be exacerbated as time progresses. It is more than fitting that a review takes place at this time.

## Review in Context

Many will be aware that there is a current drive for pathology modernisation in other parts of the UK. It is inevitable that comparisons will be made with these laboratories to inform the decision making process locally. Examples of laboratories that have already undergone significant change in the UK include: **Cumbria and Lancashire Strategic Health Authority, TeesPath, PathLinks, West Anglia Pathology Services and East Kent Pathology Service.** It is interesting to note that each of these groups has opted for a different organisational model. The review team is aware of the organisation of the above laboratories and others that have undergone similar changes outside the UK and is assessing their strengths and weaknesses relative to Northern Ireland.

The project team is aware that a number of emotions are associated with the review process: fear, cynicism, and indifference. The team appreciates that there is excellent work being carried out in the pathology laboratories in Northern Ireland, sometimes under very severe pressures.

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It is precisely these pressures that the review is trying to alleviate. Given the major changes in the rest of the UK and given the serious problems that some local laboratories are facing it seems highly likely that the review will, in the long term, have a very significant impact.

The Review project has no hidden agenda and is seeking to be as open as it possibly can be, but it must be remembered that communication is a two-way process, so if individuals feel that there is information that will further inform the review, or issues that they feel should be considered further, they should contact the chair and/or the Project Manager without delay; its a case of: “speak now, or forever hold your peace”.

## Dunadry Hotel Workshop Day

In February 2004 a very successful day was spent discussing Modernisation in the Northern Ireland context at the Dunadry Hotel in Templepatrick. Representatives of all key stakeholders were invited to this meeting and over 100 individuals registered on the day. The meeting was chaired by Dame Ingrid Allen.

Dr Ian Barnes (the Government's new Pathology Advisor) was the keynote speaker and he outlined lessons from the UK pathology modernisation experience.

Focus groups at this meeting were able to establish key priorities for laboratories locally. One comment from the workshop was: "there can never be too much communication", we hope that this newsletter goes some way in increasing that communication.



*Dr Ian Barnes*

A report, and copies of presentations made at the workshop, can be found on the Department's website at [http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hss/clinical\\_pathology/documents.asp](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hss/clinical_pathology/documents.asp).

## Healthcare Commission – Acute Hospital Portfolio



Linking in with the *Acute Hospital Portfolio – Pathology Module* represents part of the final phase of the review, with agreement secured to obtain a detailed evidence-base on issues of quality, accessibility and efficiency, as well as helping to develop models for future service delivery.

This is an exercise, originally developed by the Audit Commission for England and Wales (Healthcare Commission), in the collection of detailed data and, for those familiar with the Keele Benchmarking exercise, the detail collected is similar, although even more extensive.

While the team has been keen to gather as much evidence as they can from those engaged on the provision of pathology services on a daily basis, it is also very keen to ensure that it is not reliant on purely subjective comments and information; hence the review team's interest in the Commission's Pathology Module.

It was the Department's intent to introduce this module at some time in the near future. However, the project team felt that it could make a significant contribution to the present review by providing robust data and information in relation to the current situation and, as an ongoing process, enable assessment of the impact of any subsequent changes following the implementation of the eventual recommendations of the review. Thus the project team secured the auditors' agreement to proceed with the introduction of the pathology module now.

This data collection process is already mandatory in England and Wales and provides very useful information for benchmarking a huge range of aspects of clinical Pathology provision.

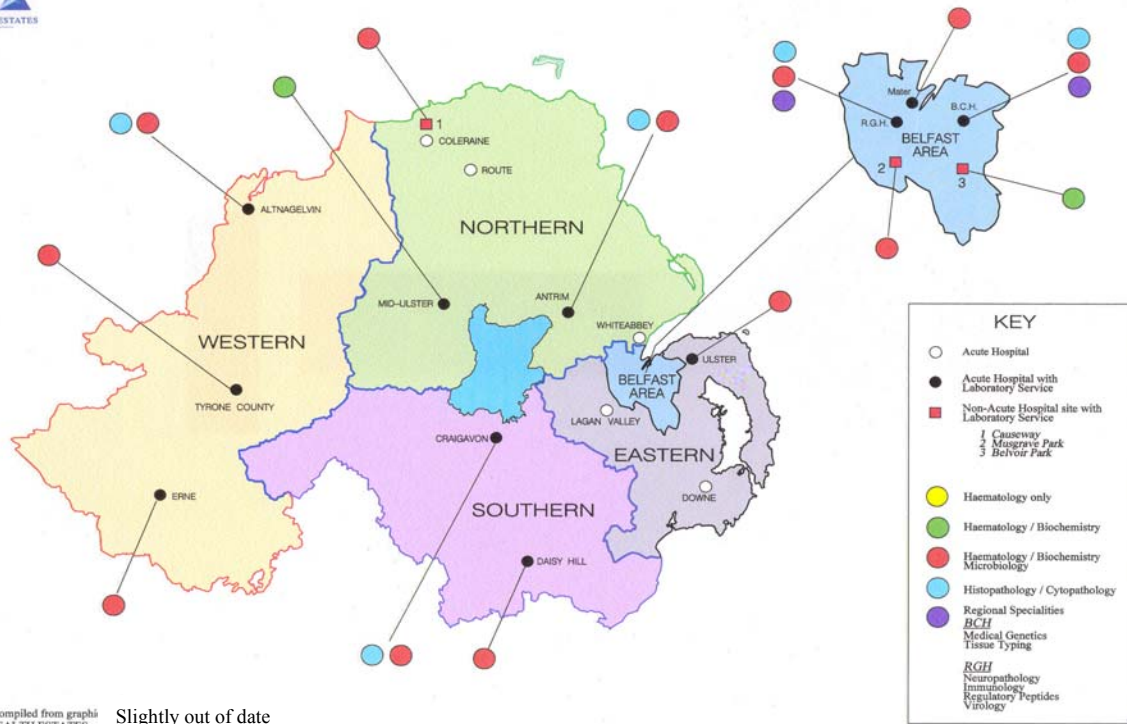
All local laboratories have begun the process, which should be completed by the end of the summer. A participant at the workshop introducing the pathology module of the Acute Hospital Portfolio wrote:

*"I was very impressed by the computer package from the Healthcare Commission. The feedback data returned to the user was pretty amazing and opens up a whole new concept in benchmarking. The participants will be able to benefit greatly from this data and will find it a valuable source of information. I am excited by the dynamics of this review and look forward to further meetings with your group."*

*All that is human must retrograde if it does not advance.* Edward Gibbon



Laboratory Services in Northern Ireland -



Drawing compiled from graphs held by HEALTH ESTATES - Slightly out of date

Currently there are nine main laboratory configurations serving a population of 1.7 million over an area of 5,456 square miles. Many factors have restricted developments in pathology in Northern Ireland and it is hoped that any future arrangement would facilitate the development of access to pathology locally. It is important to ensure that wherever patients move within the Province, there should be equity in terms of access to services of uniform high quality and that there should not be unnecessary duplication of testing. Any further testing that is required should be to the same parameters and standards as previously tested.

There are a number of possible configurations for any future laboratory system. While geographical location of laboratories is an aspect that the review will be looking at, the management of the laboratory services is just as important. In the rest of the UK many laboratories have opted for some form of Managed Network that would take into account the need for proper governance arrangements. Informal Networks exist in Northern Ireland but are less robust than the managed Networks that have been established elsewhere.



**Read All About It -The Interim Progress Report: Note from the Project Chairman**

*"I hope you will take the time to read this interim progress report, which will be available shortly. Knowing how busy you are, I can imagine you posing the question "why bother with an interim report, let's wait for the final report with recommendations, something we can get our teeth into". On behalf of the project team and project board may I plead with you to read this report, consider the issues*

*and help us formulate recommendations which will solve problems and ensure that laboratory medicine in Northern Ireland will be a model service of which we can be justly proud.*

*Chapter 5 of the report addresses the challenges we face. In the next few months we will be developing, with input from all stakeholders, solutions to problems and possible models for services. This regional review presents us with a great opportunity. It comes at a time of global change in laboratory medicine and at a time of great advances in the underpinning sciences, both biological and technological. In Northern Ireland we have a very sound basis on which to build. Help us ensure that our recommendations will provide a gold standard service, from which the entire population of Northern Ireland can benefit equally."... Dame Prof Ingrid Allen.*

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