

Computers

Making the team work



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Consistency is the key to effective management of investigation results.

CLINICAL software is an ideal tool to set up a robust system for managing investigations, but a team effort is needed for it to work efficiently.

To ensure consistency all the key players — GPs, nurses and administrative staff — should have clear knowledge of how each step works.

The following ideas should help:

1. All GPs should generate pathology and imaging requests from their clinical software. Hand-written requests can result in transcription errors at the laboratory, which can then lead to a mismatch when results are downloaded back to the GP's computer.

2. All GPs should have a consistent definition of what is meant by 'No Action', 'Discuss' and 'Urgent'. These definitions should not be treated as definitive but as a guide, and should be regularly discussed by the GPs in the practice.

3. Use clinical software to generate a daily list of 'Urgent' results. 'Discuss' results could be printed weekly or fortnightly. There should be no need to print 'No Action' lists. This helps set up a system to follow up results. A designated person (such as a nurse or practice manager) could have this role.

4. When a patient returns to see the doctor about test results, the doctor must complete a pathology management cycle by clicking on the 'Mark result as notified' button. This ensures that the patient's name is removed from the 'Return urgently' and 'Discuss' lists. In my years of working with practices to set up

pathology management systems, it has been the failure to click on the 'Mark result as notified' button that leads to faulty pathology management systems.

5. A system must be in place to make sure a patient presents for clinically significant follow-up tests. One way to do this is to set up a recall reason in the software and use it for those patients with a high risk of non-attendance and/or when clinical outcomes could be disastrous. This becomes part of the recall system and no patient should fall through the net.

The latest accreditation standards for the follow-up of tests and results insist that:

- There is a written policy and a system for the follow-up and recall of 'clinically significant' tests and results.
- Investigations are reviewed, initialled and acted on in a timely manner.

■ GPs and staff can describe the system, including follow-up.

Additional resources for pathology management can be found on the North East Valley Division of General Practice web site (www.nevdgp.org.au/?content=14#CheatSheets), including a pathology and recall self-audit tool, pathology management in Medical Director, and information on notifying patients of investigation results.