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C. 1 H. - M. -  
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(W. Hickson & Dr. Y. Chang)

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In accordance with Circular Lists A,B,C,D,J & N.

## POLICY ON PROVISION OF PATHOLOGY SERVICES IN PUBLIC HOSPITALS

1. Current policy on the provision of pathology services and charging arrangements is set out in Circulars 77/231, 77/353 and 78/139. Some of the instructions in these Circulars were formulated within the context of health insurance and service delivery arrangements that are no longer relevant.
2. In particular, the referral of pathology specimens taken from public hospital patients to private laboratories/pathologists is addressed in Circular 77/231. The relevant instruction here (paras. 6.1 and 6.2) places the onus on Regional Directors to approve such referrals to private laboratories. The main condition that must be met is that the Regional Director "must be satisfied that the test(s) cannot reasonably be performed within a hospital or regional laboratory".
3. Recently, a number of country Regional Directors and professional associations have indicated that more specific guidelines should be formulated concerning the "outside" referral of public hospital pathology. Accordingly, this Circular reinforces and clarifies previous policy on this matter.
4. In terms of the actual examination of specimens, Regions and public hospitals/areas must refer all inpatient and outpatient specimens to the appropriate Regional or Area Group Pathology Service. Specimens may only be referred on to laboratories in the private sector when these services are not available in the public sector.
5. The abovementioned referrals should only be approved by the Regional Director for country hospitals, and the Chief Health Officer in the case of metropolitan hospitals.

6. Tenders should be called from interested organisations/ individuals for the provision of such private services where this is necessary. Following the assessment of these tenders, the following conditions must be met:
- (a) the private pathologist (a recognised specialist in pathology) must be appointed as a Visiting Medical Officer of the Hospital
  - (b) the private laboratory must be accredited by NATA
  - (c) the successful tenderer must be able to provide the full range of tests required within its own facility
  - (d) the hours of availability and turn around time for results must be suitable
  - (e) the pathologist must be available on site at the hospital where appropriate, and for consultation at other times
  - (f) charging must be at the schedule rate (hospital rate) for private patients and at the tendered rate for other patients referred
  - (g) all referred specimens must be logged in the hospital Pathology Department's records and should be despatched by that Department. Reports should be received by the Pathology Department, a copy retained and the original forwarded to the clinician concerned.
7. It is recognised that, on occasions, another opinion may be requested from a private pathologist on the pathology findings in respect of certain specimens. These circumstances should be defined by appropriate consultation between the clinician-in-charge and the Director of Pathology, the latter being a suitably qualified medical practitioner.

  
**MICHAEL ROSSER,**  
Secretary.