



RIVERVIEW

Regional Medical Center

CLINICAL LABORATORY



So You Are Going To Have Laboratory Test Done!

UNDERSTANDING YOUR LAB TEST. _____

Laboratory tests drive a large part of the clinical decisions our doctors make about our health, from diagnosis through therapy and prognosis. Given the crucial role that test data play in medical decision-making, we prepared this brochure to help you understand the process your blood sample takes within the laboratory and practices that are involved in making laboratory tests reliable.

LAB PERSONNEL

There are a variety of skilled laboratory professionals who, as a patient, you may never see face-to-face. However, these individuals play a very important role in your health care. People working in the clinical lab are responsible for conducting tests that provide crucial information for detecting, diagnosing, treating, and monitoring disease. They use specialized equipment and techniques to analyze patients' samples, such as blood, urine, body tissue, and stool.

Because they produce the results that impact the health care you receive, laboratory professionals are specially educated and trained for the functions they perform and, in most cases, have certification for their position. Those in supervisory roles, with extensive training and many years of experience, oversee the testing being performed in the lab. They also ensure that strict quality control and assurance procedures are followed. Clinical labs in the United States also are regulated by the federal government under the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA).

Inside the Laboratory

Flip a switch and the lights go on. Turn the faucet and you can get a cold glass of water. Let someone stick you with a needle – or give someone something from your body – and you get information about your health.

COLLECTING THE BLOOD



Upon arrival at the collection station, a phlebotomist will greet you and explain the venipuncture procedure. He/she will verify your identity by checking your armband against your admission slip and orders. He/she will then perform the venipuncture. In the picture above, a phlebotomist has inserted a needle into a vein on the outer portion of the arm near the elbow.

LABELING THE BLOOD SAMPLE



Once the blood is drawn, the tube is labeled. The label is pre-printed with the patient's name, hospital number, and computer accession number.

For Your Safety, your specimen is always uniquely labeled thru out the testing process in the lab.

DOCUMENTING THE SPECIMEN



After the sample has been collected and labeled, it is transported to the lab where is distributed to the proper laboratory section. The tube label contains all the information necessary to ensure that the sample is turn through the appropriate tests and the eventual results are matched to your name within the laboratory computer system.

BLOOD PROCESSING



Depending upon the tests that have been ordered, your blood sample may be processed before it is analyzed. Most routine laboratory tests are performed on either plasma or serum. Plasma is the liquid portion of blood. It is separated from the cellular portion of blood by rapidly spinning the specimen in a centrifuge for several minutes. The plasma, which has a light yellow color, appears at the top of the tube, while the blood cells are at the bottom.

Serum is plasma that has been allowed to clot. It is prepared in the same way as plasma - however, the blood is collected into a tube with no anticoagulant. While spinning in the centrifuge, the clot moves with the cells to the bottom of the blood collection tube, leaving the serum on top.

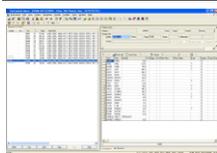
If the test requires whole blood (e.g., a complete blood count), the sample can be analyzed directly without further processing.

ANALYZING THE SAMPLE



In most cases, an instrument, appropriately called a blood analyzer, analyzes the blood sample. In this picture, the tube of blood is being placed directly into the machine.

GETTING RESULTS



With the latest technology in analyzers comes the ability to generate the results electronically to the laboratory computer system. The results can be sent electronically via network printers and/or fax machines to your physician. If your results indicate a serious condition, your physician will be notified by the laboratory immediately.

The length of time between the drawing of the blood and when your physician gets the results can vary greatly, from as little as a few minutes to as much as several days depending the test ordered.

Questions? Call 256-543-5782

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