

Clarifying our approach to the hormone receptor test issue

Our Review of hormone receptor tests

Doctors and staff at Eastern Health and the other regional health authorities work hard everyday to provide the best patient care possible. This is why we took the unprecedented step of retesting estrogen and progesterone receptor (ER/PR) tests. We wanted to ensure that the tests originally done were correct and that our patients were offered the best treatment options available. We believed that if any patient could benefit from retesting, this needed to be done. Our review involved:

1. Identifying patients whose samples required retesting.
2. Obtaining the breast tissue samples that had originally been tested.
3. Reviewing those samples and choosing the most appropriate for retesting.
4. Sending the samples chosen to the Pathology Laboratory, Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto for retesting.
5. If the retest results were returned and did not change, senior nursing staff contacted patients directly by telephone to give them the results.
6. If the retest results were returned and changed, a panel of medical experts reviewed them and identified further treatment options if necessary. The recommendations of this review were sent to the patient's doctor in writing.

Eastern Health worked with Western Health, Central Health and Labrador-Grenfell Health to retest patients and to inform them of the results of this process.

Communications with patients

Our Nursing staff and physicians have personally spoken to many of the patients affected by this retesting since July 2005. We also communicated with many other doctors who have requested clarification and assistance in supporting their patients.

Problems identified with the process Eastern Health used

Over the past two years, we discovered that some patients' samples were not initially identified and therefore not sent for retesting. This caused us grave concern as we became aware of each situation and we have investigated why this happened. Problems with the process were mainly related to difficulties in identifying all patients affected due to the limitations within our computerized information systems.

All health authorities have participated in a full review of our process coordinated by the Department of Health and Community Services. Through this review process we have identified other problems not previously identified. These mainly relate to the challenge of coordinating this process between four health authorities and hundreds of physicians.

What we have learned

As a result of what we have learned we have made improvements in our pathology laboratory to ensure the public is provided with a quality service. We have made recommendations to government with respect to how to improve our database and decision support systems and we continue to work with government toward implementation of these long-term solutions. We have identified improvements that we would make if we were faced with a similar review in the future. We look forward to all recommendations from the Commission of Inquiry.

Improvements to our Laboratory**Easter Health has made the following improvements:**

- Eastern Health had external experts visit our pathology laboratory to review the quality of the work done there. These experts provided recommendations for improvement. We have implemented or are in the process of implementing all recommendations from these external reviews.
- We have designated the part of the lab that performs the ER/PR test as a separate division with three (3) designated technologists, a lab medical director, and other technical staff.
- Our technologists and pathologists in this division have received additional specialized training in immunohistochemistry.
- We have established a Quality Management Program in this new division.
- We have consolidated all breast cases for examination and reporting to a designated group of pathologists.
- We are working with our provincial government to implement a provincial accreditation program for all laboratories in the province. This program will involve adopting a set of provincial standards and reviewing all laboratories in the province to ensure standards are met.
- We participated in a newly developed national accreditation process for laboratories through the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation program; a recognized program through which national standards are set and institutions compare their services against these standards. We are adopting recommendations made through this review.

Through all of this, Eastern Health is committed to ensuring we offer our patients the best possible service.

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