



Module 16

Professional Ethics

Purpose To provide you with the necessary attitudes, motivation, and knowledge to apply ethical conduct to HIV rapid testing.

Pre-requisite Modules Module 5. Assuring Quality of HIV Rapid Testing

Learning Objectives At the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Describe ethical issues related to HIV rapid testing
- Explain the importance of professional ethics
- Apply ethical conduct to HIV rapid testing
- Take appropriate actions to maintain client confidentiality

Content Outline

- What is ethics?
- Why is ethics important?
- Who is responsible for ethics?
- How is ethics applied to HIV rapid testing?
- Maintaining confidentiality
- Code of conduct

Handouts Guidelines for Ethical Behavior (ASCP)
Code of Ethics (IFBLS)



Provide national policy on ethics or code of conduct.

Notes on Customization

Scenario I

A pregnant woman comes for HIV testing. Your test site has just run out of the 2nd test in the algorithm. You tell her that she will have to come back in 2 days. She becomes very emotional and explains that she has traveled a long distance after finally deciding to get tested and won't be back in the area for a long time.

Feeling sorry for her, you proceed to perform test one, and report a resulting positive test to the client.

What are the issues here?

What is the right thing to do?

What are the consequences if you don't do the right thing?

Scenario II

At the HIV rapid testing site, you discover that you just run out of the buffer for Test 1 of the algorithm. Rather than denying testing to clients, you decide to go ahead and perform Test 1 using the buffer from kits of Test 2.

What are the issues here?

What is the right thing to do?

What are the consequences if you don't do the right thing?

Scenario III

Today is Monday. You discover that there are enough test devices to last through the entire week, but they will expire on Wednesday.

Since resources are tight and you don't want to waste any test kits (it is only a couple of days past expiration anyway), you decide to use the test devices until the end of the week.

What are the issues here?

What is the right thing to do?

What are the consequences if you don't do the right thing?

Scenario IV

Rick, the tester, is excited about getting home at the end of his work day, because a relative he hasn't seen in quite some time is scheduled to arrive. Right before he is ready to leave, he gets distracted by a phone call and forgets to lock up the lab register in the cabinet. .

What are the issues here?

What is the right thing to do?

What are the consequences if you don't do the right thing?

How hard is it for you to do the right thing?

Consequences of a False Positive or False Negative Result

A false positive HIV result can lead to considerable personal stress and family and marital problems. A false negative result can lead to increased transmission.

Each result you report is connected to a patient/client. A lot is at stake – people’s health, lives, mental health. The emotional costs of a wrong result can be huge. Also the health consequences can be enormous. Considerable personal stress also includes depression, fear and even suicidal tendencies.

You must strive to do the right things right.

What Is Ethics?

Ethics is “A set of principles of right conduct.”

Why is Ethics Important?

Decisions about diagnosis, prognosis and treatment are frequently based on results and interpretations of laboratory tests. Irreversible harm may be caused by erroneous tests.

In other words if we do not apply a code of ethics the patient or someone else will suffer.

Maintaining Confidentiality

It is important to:

- Keep all client/patient information private
- Secure all records / logbooks
- Restrict access to testing areas

Remember...prior to testing, clients should be informed about the purpose, advantages, and disadvantages of testing. This process ensures understanding of the Counseling-Testing process. Keeping information confidential means that it is kept a secret from everyone.

People often violate ethics not because they mean to, but because they are careless. Therefore, we must be extra vigilant about ethical conduct.

Role-Play Scenario



Watch the role play and answer these questions:

What happened?

What were the ethical issues involved?

What were the implications?

What would you do if you were in this situation?

Who is Responsible for Ethics?

Everyone at a testing site plays a part. Anyone who plays a part in testing or has access to the test results must adhere to ethical conduct. This includes medical laboratory technicians, nurse counselors, clerks, secretary, general hand, and driver.

Incidents may happen where specimens are damaged, results are falsified, or confidentiality is broken. Equally they can decide to ensure that specimens are delivered, recorded, stored and reported with high quality.

How Do We Apply Ethics To HIV Rapid Testing?

Ethics is applied in the work that we do at the test site. This includes:

- Using only kits approved for use in country
- Ensuring quality outputs – Following SOPs as written. If a test procedure calls for 20 minutes incubation or wait time, DON'T take shortcuts. Wait the full time before recording and reporting test results
- Keeping supplies and kits in safekeeping. Unauthorized use of test kits outside of the testing site is prohibited.
- If you have questions, ASK.
- DO NOT falsify results.

Ethics is also applied in your behavior. Always conduct yourself in a professional manner. Examples of professionalism include:

- Dressing appropriately. If lab coat or apron is soiled, change to a clean one
- Turning cell phones off. It is disruptive and not considerate of clients to talk on the phone during the course of testing.
- Not discussing results of interaction with clients with others. Maintaining patient confidentiality is a MUST.

Behavior of management – Management sets the example or expectations of how staff should conduct themselves.

What is a Code of Ethics?

A Code of Ethics is an expression of basic values - the principles and standards by which you should conduct yourself

A number of laboratory professional organizations have code of ethics, with common principles of conduct.

Code of Ethics (IFBLS)

Excerpts from International Federation of Biomedical Laboratory Science (IFBLS)

- Maintain strict confidentiality of patient information and test results
- Safeguard the dignity and privacy of patients
- Be accountable for the quality and integrity of clinical laboratory services. You must take personal responsibility for everything you do and be able to answer for your conduct and moral obligations to choose to do right over wrong.

Code of Ethics (ASCP)

Excerpts from American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP)

- Treat patients and colleagues with respect, care and thoughtfulness
- Perform duties in an accurate, precise, timely and responsible manner
- Safeguard patient information as confidential, within the limits of the law
- Prudently use laboratory resources



Key message

- Maintain strict confidentiality of patient information and test results
- Ethical issues are important. We must constantly remind ourselves of the code of conducts and ensure we do the right thing.
- Ethical issues are often hard to deal with because they create dilemmas.
- People often violate ethics not because they mean to, but because they are careless. As a matter of fact, they sometimes act with good intentions.



Module Review

Find out how much you have learned by answering these questions.

In your own words, what is ethics?

Why is ethics important?

Give examples of actions you can take to maintain client confidentiality.

Give an example of a code of ethics to which you are willing to personally commit.

BOARD OF REGISTRY

Guidelines for Ethical Behavior

American Society of Clinical Pathology (ASCP) Registrants and Associate Members

Recognizing that my integrity and that of my profession must be pledged to the best possible care of patients based on the reliability of my work, I will:

1. Treat patients and colleagues with respect, care and thoughtfulness
2. Perform my duties in an accurate, precise, timely and responsible manner
3. Safeguard patient information as confidential, within the limits of the law
4. Prudently use laboratory resources
5. Advocate the delivery of quality laboratory services in a cost effective manner
6. Work within the boundaries of laws and regulations and strive to disclose illegal or improper behavior to the appropriate authorities
7. Continue to study, apply and advance medical laboratory knowledge and skills and share such with my colleagues, other members of the health care community and the public.

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International Federation of Biomedical Laboratory Science (IFBLS)

Code of Ethics

Medical laboratory technologists shall:

- Be dedicated to the use of clinical laboratory science to benefit mankind
- Actively seek to establish cooperative and specific working relationships with other health professionals
- Provide expertise to advise and counsel other health professionals
- Maintain strict confidentiality of patient information and test results
- Safeguard the dignity and privacy of patients
- Be responsible for the logical process from the acquisition of the specimen to the production of data and the final report of the test results
- Be accountable for the quality and integrity of clinical laboratory services
- Exercise professional judgment, skill and care while meeting established standards
- Uphold and maintain the dignity and respect of the profession and strive to maintain a reputation of honesty, integrity and reliability
- Strive to improve professional skills and knowledge, and adopt scientific advances that benefit the patient and improve the delivery of test results.

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