

Happy Christmas and best wishes for 2010

In our last newsletter for 2009 I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all the best for the coming festive season and for the New Year.

It has been our privilege helping you this year, and I was delighted recently to see that you believe we are doing a very good job. In our annual customer survey, 97 percent of respondents rated Aotea Pathology's overall service as very good or excellent.

Ensuring that everything we do, we do well, is a core value at Aotea.

We place much emphasis on ensuring that we have good quality systems in place to help our staff do their jobs well. We also place much importance on helping our staff continually develop their skills and knowledge so they can offer you best practice and well-informed medical care.

We look forward to continuing, in 2010, to work on ways to improve our service to you.

In the meantime, enjoy the coming summer holidays. In this edition of *Inside Aotea*, we have some information on our opening hours over the holiday period.



We also have useful tips on how to enjoy the sun safely.

Regards

DR KAREN WOOD
Aotea Pathology Chief Executive

Health Tip

Sensible exposure to direct sunlight is good for your health

Vitamin D is essential for strong bones and getting calcium into the blood stream, as well as a range of other important functions.

We get more than 90 percent of our Vitamin D from direct exposure to sunlight. There are only a few foods (salmon, tuna and sardines, for example) that contain good levels of Vitamin D.

So, with summer on the way, getting out into the sun will be important. But, with the high levels of ultraviolet radiation (UVR) that we have in New Zealand, it is also important not to get sunburnt.

The Cancer Society says it has been estimated that people with fair skin who burn easily can achieve sufficient vitamin D levels in summer by exposing the face, arms and hands or the equivalent area of skin to a few minutes of sunlight on either side of the peak UVR periods several days a week. People who tan more easily or have darker skin will need a longer exposure time to achieve the same effect.

It is better to expose larger areas of skin for shorter periods rather than exposing smaller areas of skin for longer periods.

THE JOURNEY OF A SKIN BIOPSY SPECIMEN

Ever wondered what happens to a skin biopsy specimen at the laboratory? Pathologist Dr Christopher Pease explains how one is processed.

The first step

The specimen arrives at the laboratory in a water-based formalin solution, which preserves the tissue in its journey from the doctor's clinic.

The specimen is given a barcode and details are logged into the electronic tracking system.

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STAFF PROFILE

introducing...



Ilise Crockett

Position: At Aotea Pathology, I am in the Phlebotomy team. This means that when you come to see us for a blood test, I may be the person who collects your sample. I also work as the Serial Testing Co-ordinator.

Qualifications: I have worked in laboratories since November 2001, in both Wanganui and Wellington, and in 2007 I attained the Qualified Phlebotomy Technician qualification.

Responsibilities: As a phlebotomist my responsibilities include collecting good quality samples from patients, while making the experience as pleasant as possible for them. As the Serial Testing Co-ordinator, I run a computer system which manages testing for patients who require regular visits. At present we have over 7000 patients in this database. When a doctor sends us a request for regular testing, we enter the details into the system and issue the patient with a card, which they can bring into any of our branches to have their test done. Once a year, we review the tests required with the doctor, so no one has to have an unnecessary blood test and no tests have been missed.

Most rewarding part of your job:

The most rewarding part of my job is being able to help people. It gives you real satisfaction knowing you are a step in a patient's treatment, and it is really nice being able to share people's high moments in life.

How do you most enjoy spending time

outside work: I am a bit of a music addict, so there is not a day goes by without it. In summer I love the beach, and in winter, a good book. And I love to spend time just chatting with people.

Health tip: Whenever the sun is shining, even if it is still cold, make sure you soak it up. The Vitamin D is good for you, and it does wonders for your mental health!

Test preparation

The size and characteristics of the specimen are recorded by a pathologist. The specimen is then deposited into the histology processing machine overnight, which uses a chemical process to remove all the water from the specimen. Next the dehydrated specimen is embedded in paraffin wax to support it, and encased in a small cassette.

A thin slice

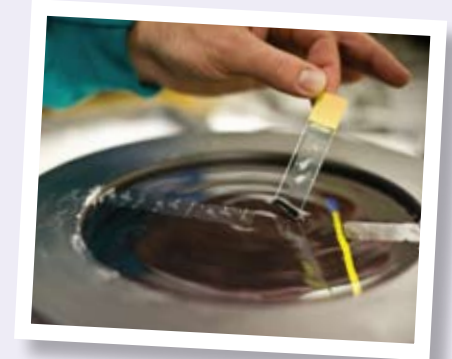
Technicians use a machine called a microtome to take very thin slices of tissue from the specimen. Forceps are used to pick up a strip of several slices, which hang off the edge of each other – a little like a daisy chain. The chain of tissue slices is floated on a warm water bath to expand the paraffin wax. This removes all the wrinkles in the slices, leaving a very even, very thin slice of tissue.



A tissue sandwich

The technician selects the best sample (or samples) to use. The tissue is picked

up with a glass slide, and placed into a machine which stains the tissue so cells can be seen under the microscope. Two stains are used – haematoxylin which stains the nuclei of the cell blue, and eosin which stains the cytoplasm of the cell pink.



After the machine dissolves the paraffin wax, it creates a tissue sandwich, layering the glass slide, the stained tissue and a clear thin glass coating. The slide is then ready for the final step – diagnosis.

The final step

A pathologist looks at the slide under a microscope, and makes a diagnosis. As Dr Pease says, 'the ultimate diagnosis is made by a human with eyes', as opposed to other tests which are machine-based. A daily meeting also gives the pathologists the opportunity to discuss results. The results of the testing are usually returned to the doctor in 3-4 days.

Christmas and New Year collection centre closures

Please note that all our collection centres are closed on 25-28 December and 1-4 January.

Some of our collection centres are also closed from 29-31 December and from 5-8 January, or will be operating on restricted hours.

Please call us on 381 5900 if you think you might need to visit us during those dates and are not sure if your collection centre will be open.

