

## QUALITY ASSURANCE PROGRAMMES – AN INTRODUCTION

M. deG. GRIBBLE

*Chairman, Quality Assurance Science and Education Committee, Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia.*

The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia introduced its first Quality Assurance Programme in Chemical Pathology in 1961. This was followed by a Haematology one in 1965, and by 1968 there was a programme covering each of the main disciplines of Pathology.

The principles which have guided the designers of these Programmes are:

1. They shall be simple and straightforward.

Instructions must be easily intelligible and the exercises must be within the capability of the majority of the laboratories taking part.

2. Exercises must be varied, interesting, relevant to the usual routine work of the laboratories, and present a challenge to participants without getting too esoteric for smaller laboratories.

3. Assessment of results must be accurate, available quickly after results have been received and easily understood.

4. There is little point in finding the same errors and inaccuracies repeated in each exercise by the same laboratories. The object of Quality Assurance is to improve performance and so the educational aspect of the Programmes assumes great importance.

The College Programmes include educational material dealing with methodology, clinical interpretation and more general aspects of clinical pathology in each mailing. Persistent

follow-up may be required to make sure that the comments made have been understood and acted upon.

5. As part of the educational activities, Programme organisers must be easily accessible so that they can answer specific queries and help individual laboratories on matters which may not always be easily dealt with in the general educational material.

6. Laboratories must have complete confidence that their results remain a matter which is totally confidential between each individual laboratory and the Programme organisers. The organisers of the College programmes must, of necessity, know individual laboratory results, but these are never divulged to any committee or individual in the College, nor to any outside body, be it Government or private. Government Accreditation of laboratories in Australia may make it mandatory for inspectors to see QAP results and laboratories will have to produce them when asked, but the College will not provide information about individual or group performances to the Government in my circumstances.

The following papers show how these principles have been put into effect in the various disciplines.

Address for reprint requests: Dr. M. deG. Gribble, 1 Goodwood Road, Wayville 5034, South Australia.