



The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

Object 24: Quality assurance



What is it?

Quality assurance (QA) is the practice of assessing performance of all stages of pathology testing to provide the best possible service for patients. Identifying and assessing all aspects of quality is key to the provision of a safe and reliable diagnostic service. It gives patients and doctors the confidence to make decisions based on pathology results.

History

The concept of quality assurance has been around for hundreds of years. The medieval guild practice of long apprenticeships and regulation of master craftsmen was a form of quality assurance. In modern times QA was first used in industry but wasn't introduced to the pathology lab until the 1950s.

Pathology

In the UK QA was pioneered by Professor Tom Whitehead, who worked with the Department of Health to develop a National Quality Control Scheme for Clinical Chemistry, the forerunner of the United Kingdom National External Quality Assessment Service (UK NEQAS), which covers many disciplines to this day. Over 7,000 laboratories in over 80 countries now participate in NEQAS programmes.

Find out more

You can read Prof Whitehead's paper on NEQAS from 1981 in the [Journal of Clinical Pathology](#).