



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
ALEXANDER FLEMING HOUSE  
ELEPHANT AND CASTLE LONDON SE1 6BY  
TELEPHONE 01-407 5522 EXT 6547  
GTN (2915)

EL(88)P/187 ✓ *Jle*

Your reference: PEM/2/19A  
Our reference:

To: General Managers of:  
Regional Health Authorities  
District Health Authorities  
Special Health Authorities for the  
London Postgraduate Teaching Hospitals

M.R.H.A. - ADMIN.	
RCVD. 2 - NOV 1988	
FOR ACTION BY	<i>ATC</i>
COPIES SENT TO:-	
31 October 1988	

Dear General Manager

### MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING OF PATHOLOGY SERVICES

1. In 1987 the Joint DHSS/NHS Manpower Planning Advisory Group commissioned a report from independent consultants, the Management Advisory Service (MAS), under a team led by Mr Derek Mowbray, to consider the organisation and staffing of pathology services. In drawing up the report Mr Mowbray sought the views of a reference group of customers and providers. Two copies of the MAS report are enclosed for information.
2. The MPAG referred the report to the NHS Management Board and Regional Chairmen and it has been considered by them and within the Department. The report has been helpful in highlighting a number of issues which need to be addressed. These issues and the Department's initial response are set out in the attached note.
3. Our proposals are guided by the following principles:
  - the importance of resources being deployed efficiently and effectively to serve the needs of patients;
  - the need for flexibility in the deployment of staff, consistent with maintaining the quality of work;
  - the need for clear definitions of managerial roles;
  - a recognition of the vital role of pathologists in supervision of the work done in their departments, in management of resources, and in advising clinicians on the appropriateness of diagnostic tests.

We recognise also that local problems need local solutions. Within the framework of national guidance, individual health authorities will be encouraged to develop arrangements appropriate to local circumstances.

4. District Health Authorities should direct their responses through Regional General Managers who should co-ordinate replies.

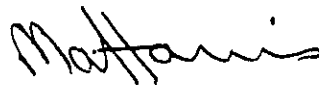
5. We should be grateful for comments on our proposals to be sent by 28 February 1989 to:

Health Services Division 1B  
Department of Health  
Room A414  
Alexander Fleming House  
Elephant and Castle  
London SE1 6BY

6. A copy of this letter and report has also been sent to the Regional Scientific Officers.

7. Further copies of the MAS report are available from DHSS Leaflets Unit, PO Box 21, Stanmore, Middlesex, HA7 1AY, price £10.50 net.

Yours sincerely



M A HARRIS  
Health Services Division

**MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING OF PATHOLOGY SERVICES****Proposals****Rationalisation of Services**

1. Health authorities should pursue the scope for further rationalisation of pathology services where gains in efficiency and quality of service can be expected. Where services cross District boundaries all those health authorities affected should be consulted in preparing proposals.

**Management of Pathology Services**

2. The MAS report has identified ambiguities and uncertainties as to management responsibilities. Improvements are necessary. However the options put forward in the report may pay insufficient regard to:

- the role of pathologists (including scientists of equivalent standing) in the "analysis phase". While these senior staff need not be concerned with day to day application of agreed methods, they will properly be personally involved in many of the investigations and in the choice of methods for all of them;

- the clinical responsibility of pathologists for the results of work done in their department.

3. Arrangements are needed to ensure:

- clear managerial responsibilities within the pathology service;
- an adequate overall service performing appropriate investigations to meet diagnostic, patient monitoring and screening needs;
- adequate quality control with speedy and accurate reporting;
- an appropriate distribution of resources between the budget holders in individual departments;
- a staffing mix that is efficient and cost effective.

In many Districts (but not perhaps teaching or other large districts) an appropriate way of promoting this would be for the Health Authority to appoint a Director of Pathology (who might typically be one of the existing heads of department chosen for their proven management skills) on a fixed term management contract to take responsibility for the overall management of pathology services. Heads of department would be managerially accountable to the Director. The department would remain the basic unit of organisation, as indicated in HSC(IS)16. Where microbiology services are provided by the PHLS the PHLS Director would retain full managerial responsibility but would liaise closely with the Director of Pathology to ensure the District's needs are being met appropriately.

4. Pathologists (including scientists of equivalent standing) will remain responsible for the work done in their department. We have doubts over the appropriateness of the MAS concept of a Laboratory Manager, covering all specialties and reporting direct to the Director of Pathology. The Director of Pathology may however require the assistance of an MLSO of appropriate grade in managing common services on his behalf.

5. An essential ingredient of good management is the introduction of a means of framing objectives and assessing performance. Pathology services, including the performance of the Director, should be subject to regular reviews every four to five years. We envisage such reviews being conducted by the District but with one or more pathologists from outside the district participating. Such reviews would cover the performance of management, the quality and cost-effectiveness of the service and its responsiveness to clinical needs.

6. Improvements in the management of pathology services are best advanced by Health Authorities trying out new approaches. We shall therefore welcome experiments with managerial innovations, provided there is proper preparation and consultation, and proper arrangements for evaluating their effects.

7. The importance of the role of non-medical research scientists is reaffirmed. Consistent with the philosophy of making the best use of available talents, appropriately qualified and experienced scientists should continue to be eligible to be heads of department.

8. In our view Quality Control and Quality Assurance are best secured by good management (including the reviews proposed above) and by full participation in external Quality Assessment schemes. The disadvantages of statutory Quality assessment schemes appear to outweigh their benefits.

### Staffing

9. The MAS report suggests that many staff are over-qualified for the work they perform, that there are inadequate opportunities for career development, and that staffing arrangements can be excessively rigid. This suggests that changes are required to achieve the objectives of:

- cost-effective use of staff
- career advancement opportunities determined by individual competence.
- flexibility to respond to varying circumstances.

10. The Management Side of the Professional and Technical B Whitley Council has been negotiating with the Staff Side representing MLSOs on its proposals to:-

- introduce a more flexible pay and grading structure
- introduce a new grade of Medical Laboratory Assistant
- put MLSO, Medical Laboratory Assistants and associated grades such as cytology screeners, on a common spine.

11. The MAS report proposes that scientists be amalgamated with MLSOs in a single "technologists" group. Discussions on this issue between the relevant professional groups are currently proceeding under the chairmanship of Professor Roger Dyson. It would not be appropriate to put forward proposals on amalgamation until these discussions have been concluded. Any consequent proposals for change will have to be negotiated jointly in the appropriate Whitley Councils.

12. We would welcome views on what further steps, if any, need to be taken to provide a structure which clearly differentiates between skill levels, but allows individuals to move between levels when they have acquired the skills necessary for the higher grade.

13. The MAS suggestions on out of hours working are being put to the Whitley Council Management Side.

List of groups and organisations for consultation:

RHAs, DHAs and SHAs for London PGs  
Public Health Laboratory Service - Director of Service  
Royal College of Pathologists  
Association of Medical Microbiologists  
Association of Clinical Pathologists  
Joint Consultants Committee  
Community Medicine Consultative Committee  
General Medical Services Committee  
Association of Clinical Biochemists  
British Medical Association  
Welsh Office  
SHHD  
Northern Ireland  
Institute of Medical Laboratory Sciences  
Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine  
Staff Side Secretary of the General Whitley Council  
Management Side Secretary of the Professional and Technical Staffs 'B'  
Whitley Council  
Management Side Secretary of the Scientific and Professional Staffs  
Council