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SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

19 October 2021

Dear Colleague,

### **Responsible Pathology Requesting**

#### **Background:**

Improving how referring doctors use laboratory tests is becoming a widely-used operating strategy in hospital and health systems.

This strategy is popular for two reasons. First, when a lab works with doctors to eliminate unnecessary or duplicate test orders, the cost savings are immediate. Second, when doctors get better at ordering the right test at the right time, patient outcomes and patient satisfaction scores improve.

There is currently a drive in pathology to harmonise processes and remove unnecessary waste, thereby saving money. Unnecessary repeat testing represents wastage within scarce healthcare budgets. The concept of defining, where possible, time intervals whereby repeat testing would be unjustified, is one that could be useful for demand optimisation purposes.

#### **What is a minimal re-testing interval?**

Minimal re-testing intervals (MRI) are defined as the minimum time before a test should be repeated, based on the properties of the test and the clinical situation in which it is used. How often a test should be repeated is based on several criteria:

- The physiological properties
- Biological half-life
- Analytical aspects
- Treatment and monitoring requirements
- Established guidance.



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The following organisations, amongst others, have published MRI guidelines based on these criteria:

- The Guidelines and Audit Implementation Network UK
- The Association of Clinical Biochemists UK
- The Australian Association of Clinical Chemists
- The American Association of Clinical Biochemists
- The South African National Health Laboratory Service has instituted an MRI project nationally over the past few years.

#### **Our approach:**

NPG laboratories have developed software to monitor repeat test orders that occur within internationally published MRI intervals. We will refine these intervals in consultation with our referring doctors.

We want to assist doctors and hospitals in reducing unnecessary test orders with a view to:

- In-hospital, reducing the average cost per admission
- Out-of-hospital, reducing the average cost per patient visit

This will assist doctors and hospitals in attracting funding from medical schemes and being included in their networks as we demonstrate together that we are advancing the value equation

(Value = Quality/Cost) in the best interests of patient care.

#### **Implementation**

The responsible requesting initiative will start nationally on 1 November 2021.

In the pilot phase, a limited set of tests will be included in the project. These tests are listed in the table below, with their minimum retesting intervals. As the project matures, more tests will be added in consultation with referring doctors.

Test requests that breach the minimum frequency threshold will be processed.

Referring doctors will receive laboratory reports containing the current and previous test results/dates ordered within the MRI together with a comment that the minimum retesting interval for that test has been breached.



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TEST	MRI
Vitamin D	90 days
HbA1C	60 days
Lipogram	60 days
Iron profile	14 days
TSH	28 days

We look forward to collaborating with our clinical colleagues to reduce waste in pathology testing.

Yours Sincerely,

NPG