
Quality assurance activities for 26 selected laboratory functions have been compiled into a notebook that can serve as a workbook and a guide. These functions span basic reagent preparation (bleach/water cleaning solutions), to more intricate and critical tasks such as transcribing results (blood gas). The authors were diligent in identifying functions that either require compliance to meet regulations or apply to quality-improvement processes for clinical care. They suggest applications exist for “other health care disciplines.”

Steps and documentation for threshold level identification, data collection and summarization, and quality-assurance (QA) activity summarization have been more than adequately described. Each activity instruction sheet lists specific, relevant, and clear action steps to take “if performance/compliance is unacceptable.” Sample memorandums and corrective-action forms are included for 7 of the 26 activities, which specifically concern blood gas specimen collection and result reporting, because other personnel might be the ones involved in these pre- and postanalytical phases. Ten additional activities contain knowledge-assessment checklists instead of corrective-action forms because these activities relate to tasks most likely performed by laboratory personnel.

Several activities would be useful for laboratories besides stat laboratories: Documentation of instrument maintenance (N), Review of daily log sheets (Q), and Adherence to critical values protocol (R). Other activities—Use of Material Safety Data Sheets (T), Knowledge of fire procedures (W), Handling complaints (X), and Verification of staff competency (Z)—could be incorporated into general programs in which all laboratory personnel would be required to participate. Laboratory management and technical personnel could compare their existing activities with ones in this workbook to verify that their QA protocols fulfill regulations and meet their own standards. They might find additional components that would provide improvements in their QA protocols.

I was impressed that the authors included two activities rarely described in QA materials: Adherence to continuing education requirements (Y), and Verification of staff competency (Z). While continuing education (CE) may only be recommended in those states or areas with no licensure mandate for it, laboratory directors are not prevented from requiring a designated amount of CE for laboratory personnel under their aegis.

The price, $49 for AACC members/$60 non-members, appears to be based on this workbook as a “book.” This seems a bit much as it really is a 219-page notebook, of which 193 pages are worksheets of similar format. Other minor shortcomings do not detract from the overall benefits this workbook provides. For example, all instruction sheets list action steps to take “if performance/compliance is unacceptable” but 19 activities lack knowledge-assessment checklists, which users may need to develop to prepare retraining or review sessions.

I would recommend a second line on the Threshold Identification Sheet for the laboratory director to sign both when the acceptable threshold level is established/documented and when the audit and interpretation is completed. I would prefer more space to describe what to do on the Corrective-Action Form even though steps are listed in the Instructions and space is provided on the QA Activity Summary Sheet. Adding spaces on the Progress Chart to record dates when audits are performed would be helpful and may be essential to track frequency of progress toward improvement. The authors may assume users of this workbook would have access to QA information and regulations because definitions, references, or suggested readings are not included.

This workbook’s usefulness is apparent because of the relevance of the laboratory functions selected, the clarity of instructions, and practicality of worksheets and forms. One adaptation of some of the steps in the Instructions regarding unacceptable performance and knowledge-assessment forms could be for competence-assessment programs. Another potential benefit of this workbook is the use of the activities in interdepartmental QA programs. It would serve as documentation to meet a specific regulatory expectation: Improve the quality of clinical care provided by the healthcare organization through interdepartmental interactions.

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This comprehensive handbook is a valuable addition to the reference library of today’s clinical laboratory, physician, or other healthcare worker. This enlarged edition is updated and expanded from the 1994 edition. Although written by 27 contributors from all areas of laboratory medicine, each section is similarly formatted, which contributes to value and ease of use.

The book begins with a general overview of selected topics. The first section includes a discussion of the factors affecting laboratory values, normal ranges, and a review of statistics. The second section focuses on the regulations, hazard communication, and record-keeping involved in specimen collection. These sections are concise and adequately address the topics.

The main body of the book is broken down by major clinical laboratory disciplines, listed in alphabetical