

OCCASIONAL PAPERS

# Blood Sample Survey

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A recurring problem in the hospital service is the position of the nurse who takes blood samples from patients.

Liverpool Regional Hospital Board, through its nursing advisory committee, agreed in January 1970 to obtain views from its hospital management committees before revising its policy on this subject. The regional board asked that the pamphlet, *The Duties and Position of the Nurse*, issued jointly by the Rcn and the British Medical Association, also be taken into consideration during discussion, the main statement of the document being that joint committees of nurses and doctors should be set up to discuss items of professional interest.

In the Central Wirral Group of Hospitals, it was soon realized that formal machinery of this precise nature did not exist. Preliminary questions to both consultants and nurses soon made it clear that no one person appeared to know the true position within each hospital.

The chief nursing officer decided, therefore, to hold a survey in each ward and department in the main hospital complex. This covered approximately 1,130 beds in four hospitals and, in addition, a special hypertension unit, accident and emergency and outpatient departments.

**Survey Procedure**

The nursing administrative staff were briefed and a letter sent to each

senior ward and departmental sister before the survey started. The survey was conducted by means of a form, requesting that the numbers of blood samples taken by nurses be recorded. The numbers were entered each mid-day and evening. On the same form, the time taken for obtaining the specimens in minutes was recorded. Lastly, the grades of staff taking the samples were indicated on the form. Each evening, the nurse in charge of the ward signed the form indicating that the recordings that day were, in fact, correct.

The survey continued for a period of four weeks which included Easter holidays. During the final week a questionnaire was sent out to every member of staff who had actually taken blood samples during the time of the survey.

**Results of the Survey**

A total of 3,357 specimens were collected by 92 trained nurses in the four weeks of the survey, taking 179 hours 11 minutes on the task. In every week but one (Easter weekend) Monday was the busiest day. In the holiday week, Tuesday became the busiest day.

Total number of specimens collected for each hospital were:  
 Radiotherapy/Geriatrics (256 beds) 76 (2.3% of total).  
 General Medicine/Surgery/Other Departments (608 beds) 2,880 (85.7% of total).

Chest (205 beds) 17 (0.5% of total).  
 Midwifery (62 beds) 384 (11.5% of total).

The demands for nursing staff time came from the general hospital and the maternity hospital. In the general hospital over 24% of the specimens came from a special research hypertension unit, while a single medical ward took 10% of the total for that hospital, with the outpatient department coming third with 7%. In the maternity hospital, the antenatal/labour suite accounted for 68% of specimens and the premature baby unit 11%.

**Comparison of Morning and Afternoon Times**

In the general hospital 76% of specimens were collected in the morning, while in the maternity hospital only 45% were collected at that time. The reason for the lower number among maternity patients was that many of the specimens were taken by midwives at the antenatal clinics held in the hospital each Wednesday and Friday afternoon.

If the time taken to collect the specimens each day were averaged throughout the four-week period, the results would read:

	Hours	Minutes
Monday	9	25
Tuesday	8	19
Wednesday	9	23
Thursday	7	41
Friday	6	48



The main lesson to be learned from this survey was that neither consultant nor nurse administrator could, before the survey, estimate accurately the time spent on this activity. One doctor stated that nurses did not take specimens in his department, but by means of the survey it was proven that a few specimens were, in fact, collected during the period of the survey.

### Questionnaire Results

#### Q.1. How long have you been taking blood specimens?

A total of 85 replies from trained nurses were received.

Nurses taking blood for	
less than 1 year	5 (6%)
1-5 years	33 (39%)
6-10 years	15 (18%)
11-15 years	9 (10%)
16-20 years	16 (8%)
21 and over	7 (19%)
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	85 100%

#### Q.2. Have you ever received formal instruction or teaching for this procedure? (86 replies were received for all the following questions.)

YES	55 (64%)
NO	31 (36%)

#### Q.3. If you have answered 'YES' to Q.2,

(a) Who gave you this instruction or teaching?

Sisters	37 (67%)
Doctors	9 (15%)
Doctor and sister	2 (4%)
Laboratory technician	2 (4%)
Tutor and sister	2 (4%)
Tutor and doctor	1 (2%)
Tutor	1 (2%)
Staff nurse	1 (2%)
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	55 100%

(b) How many years ago?

These replies matched with the results of Q.1.

#### Q.4. If you take blood specimens regularly, does this take you away from other nursing duties?

YES	54 (59%)
NO	32 (41%)

#### Q.5. If you have answered 'YES' to Q.4, please list the duties you should be undertaking at this time.

Preparation for treatments	14
General nursing care	11
Chaperoning doctors	11
(all these replies came from outpatient departments)	
Supervision of work and staff	11
Teaching nurses	5
Assisting patients	5
Bedmaking	4
Office work	4
Treatments	3
Talking to patients	2
Giving drugs and medicines	1
Cleaning	1
Feeding patients	1
Telephoning	1
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	74

#### Q.6. Are you satisfied that the present arrangements for taking blood are adequate?

YES	46 (53%)
NO	40 (47%)

#### Q.7. If you have answered 'NO' to Q.6, please give

(a) Your reasons:

Legally not covered in case of accident	7
Too much time taken by nurses taking specimens to laboratory	4
Nurses not taught procedure in training	3
Too much responsibility on the nurse	2
Eight other reasons were given by different nurses, including: no hospital policy; it is not a nursing duty; nursing treatment interrupted; but no two nurses gave the same reason.	

(b) Your suggestions for improving the situation:

Laboratory staff to take samples	12
Doctors to take samples	9
Training to be given to nurses	4
Legal cover to be given to nurses	4
Doctors to make out laboratory forms for all samples of blood	3
Doctors/laboratory staff to take specimens	3
More frequent collection of specimens	2
Backing of HMC and consultants for nurses taking samples	2

Four other single suggestions were given, including a definite policy for the group.

### Conclusion

From the information received from the wards and departments a 20-page report was compiled. Each senior nursing officer was given a personal copy and two others to circulate to the wards. A four-page summary was also issued through the normal written communications system as an 'Information Statement'.

Senior management have been appointed under the Salmon scheme to plan policy. It is so easy to lay down policy without first finding out all the facts. Although this survey was conducted in March-April 1970, at the time of writing (October 1970) no policy has been decided. The question, 'Should nurses be taking blood specimens?' is still being asked.

Soon area discussions will take place with many interested parties. Only then will policy slowly emerge. Perhaps it is wise in this case to make haste slowly and formulate a successful system which may stand the test of time. This is just one of many activities being investigated at this time within the Central Wirral complex and perhaps a further study may appear within the next few months.