

Programming the teaching of diagnostic parasitology: The UK National External Quality Assessment Service (NEQAS) approach.

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INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE



Faecal and blood parasites are public health concerns within Europe.¹ Parasite diagnostic laboratories are not widespread within the EU/EEA and the retirement of key experts is affecting the transfer of knowledge. UK NEQAS Parasitology was established in 1986 as one of a number of UK NEQAS schemes providing quality assessment in most disciplines of pathology.² In 1993 a parasitology teaching programme was set up to counteract falling standards that was apparent at the time through the UK NEQAS Parasitology Schemes.

METHODS

- Clinical samples are used for the teaching.
- Faecal and Blood parasite microscopy are offered.
- Introductory lectures followed by practical sessions provide hands on experience.
- A Review quiz ends the day's activities.
- A limited number of samples are given to participants to take back to their labs for more practice.



RESULTS

The inception of this special teaching programme has offered a mechanism for tackling the following common problems encountered by participants:

- Problems of over estimating parasitaemia in malaria cases.
- Problems of mixed infections in malaria (eg. *P. ovale* / *P. vivax* ; *P. malariae*/ *P. knowlesi*).
- Differentiation of faecal artefacts (e.g. vegetable matter) from parasite larvae, cysts and ova.
- Identification of different kinds of cysts in mixed infections.
- Identification of small operculate ova (e.g. *Clonorchis*).
- Identification of small protozoan cysts.

In addition to training days, the following are also available for participants to access:

- Website- Newly created to facilitate course registration, requisition of technical assistance and engagement in continuing professional development learning activities.
- Collaboration in the running of International courses allow our International participants to receive quality assistance from UK NEQAS.

This unique teaching programme attracts the following health professionals:

- Trainee Clinical Scientists.
- Parasitology Registrars (Junior Doctors) in training.

CONCLUSION

- UK NEQAS for Parasitology has a robust approach to tackling poor performance and maintaining a high standard of diagnostic parasitology.

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