



# PathWay

THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PATHOLOGISTS OF AUSTRALASIA



Issue #053

NOVEMBER 2015 | Published by RCPA

## In This Issue

- Rock star and feted journalist add a personal touch to International Pathology Day celebration
- RCPA clarifies its position on vitamin B12 and folate testing
- Controversial pathogen testing reined in by new guidelines
- Pathologists have a 'safeguarding' role in organ and tissue donation

## Welcome to the November edition of ePathWay



(l-r) Dr Debra Graves, Kirk Pengilly, A/Prof Peter Stewart

## Interesting Facts

14,935

The number of people who signed up to the *Know Pathology Know Healthcare* website to show they value pathology.

More than 13

The minimum number of years it takes to become a pathologist.

Pathologists, scientists and laboratories around the globe – Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, the UK, Ireland, the USA, Canada and South Africa – celebrated the second International Pathology Day (IPD) on November 18. IPD recognises the role of pathology in the healthcare community, and in the lives of everyone.

The RCPA welcomed rock star Kirk Pengilly (INXS guitarist and saxophonist) and award winning journalist Elise Worthington to its IPD celebration in Sydney. Both guests shared their personal stories about why pathology matters to them.

70%

The percentage of medical decisions that rely on pathology.

Source: Know Pathology Know Healthcare

## Important Message



has an important message for you.

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## Previous Editions

Did you miss something from last month? You can view our [previous editions](#) at any time.

## Links

[RCPA Manual](#)

[Lab Tests Online](#)

[Know Pathology Know Healthcare](#)

The RCPA also released a new [position statement and guideline](#) at the celebration; recommendations for faecal pathogen screening to reduce unnecessary testing, and another clarifying vitamin B12 and folate testing.

The College also remembered [DonateLife Thank You Day](#) on November 22, which gives Australians the opportunity to honour organ and tissue donors and their families by simply saying 'thank you'. Our story looks at the role of pathologists in organ and tissue donations, and showcases the newly upgraded [Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria](#) (DTBV) which opened last month.

For more information and pics about IPD, visit our website [www.rcpa.edu.au](http://www.rcpa.edu.au) or see our updates on Twitter - @PathologyRCPA - and [Facebook](#). #PathologyStory #IPD2015 #MedicinesPathology #RCPA

And remember! This is what a [world without pathology](#) might look like.

## Rock star and feted journalist add a personal touch to International Pathology Day celebration



(l-r) Kirk Pengilly, Elise Worthington

Rock star Kirk Pengilly and award winning journalist Elise Worthington are used to the spotlight, but this time their appearance was personal. Both have benefited from the expertise of pathologists and scientists, and they celebrated International Pathology Day (IPD) on November 18 with RCPA Fellows, staff and guests by sharing their individual stories.

[read more »](#)

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## RCPA clarifies its position on vitamin B12 and folate testing

Rock star royalty and champagne may have been part of the International Pathology Day (IPD) celebrations at the RCPA's Sydney headquarters last week, but business items were on the agenda as well. One item was the release of a new [position statement](#) clarifying the use and interpretation of vitamin B12 and folate testing for diagnosing and monitoring deficiency.



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## Controversial pathogen testing reined in by new guidelines

This year's International Pathology Day (IPD) celebrations at the RCPA's headquarters in Sydney had a touch of everything - including a [guideline](#) about some controversial little guys. Thanks to new DNA-based diagnostic methods, some faecal pathogens are now known to be more common than previously thought, and their detection has led to cases of over- diagnosis and over-treatment.



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## Pathologists have a 'safeguarding' role in organ and tissue donation

[DonateLife Thank You Day](#) was observed



last Sunday (November 22) to give Australians the opportunity to honour organ and tissue donors and their families by simply saying 'thank you'. It was hot on the heels of International Pathology Day (November 18), so we thought we'd look at the vital yet often invisible role of pathologists in the organ and tissue donation process.



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# ePathWay

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Published by RCPA

## Previous Editions



OCTOBER 2015 | PUBLISHED BY RCPA

ISSUE #052

### IN THIS ISSUE

- Plague is still active after all these years
- New prostate cancer grading system offers an alternative to Gleason scores
- Coeliac disease has a growing list of mimics
- Long QT syndrome can

### Welcome to the October edition of ePathWay

The plague is infamous for inflicting history-changing misery and death in centuries long gone. But did you know it's still an active disease around the world? Our story gives a potted history of this disease and highlights the current hotspots.

It's also **Shoctober** which is code for Defib Awareness Month. But what has pathology got to do with cardiac arrest? Quite a lot actually – if you have long QT syndrome.

Coeliac disease is like the 'Elvis' of conditions with its growing list of

2015

[044 - February 2015](#)

[045 - March 2015](#)

[046 - April 2015](#)

[047 - May 2015](#)

[048 - June 2015](#)

[049 - July 2015](#)

[050 - August 2015](#)

[051 - September 2015](#)

[052 - October 2015](#)

2014

[033 - February 2014](#)

[034 - March 2014](#)

[035 - April 2014](#)

[036 - May 2014](#)

[037 - June 2014](#)

[038 - July 2014](#)

[039 - August 2014](#)

[040 - September 2014](#)

[041 - October 2014](#)

[042 - November 2014](#)

[043 - Dec 2014/Jan 2015](#)

2013

[022 - February 2013](#)

[023 - March 2013](#)

[024 - April 2013](#)

[025 - May 2013](#)

[026 - June 2013](#)

[027 - July 2013](#)

[028 - August 2013](#)

[029 - September 2013](#)

[030 - October 2013](#)

[031 - November 2013](#)

[032 - Dec 2013/Jan 2014](#)

2012

[010 - Dec 2011/Jan 2012](#)

[011 - February 2012](#)

[012 - March 2012](#)

[013 - April 2012](#)

[014 - May 2012](#)

[015 - June 2012](#)

[016 - July 2012](#)

[017 - August 2012](#)

[018 - September 2012](#)

[019 - October 2012](#)

[020 - November 2012](#)

[021 - December 2012](#)

2011

[001 - March 2011](#)

[002 - April 2011](#)

[003 - May 2011](#)

[004 - June 2011](#)

[005 - July 2011](#)

[006 - August 2011](#)

[007 - September 2011](#)

[008 - October 2011](#)

[009 - November 2011](#)

[« Back to Home Page](#)

---

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- [Clinical Problems](#)
- [Pathology Tests](#)
- [Pathology Decision Support Tools](#)
- [Glossary](#)

#### External Links

- [RCPA Catalogue of Genetic Tests](#)
- [LabTests Online AU](#)
- [MBS Online Search Page](#)

# Manual of Use and Interpretation of Pathology Tests

The main purpose of this Manual is to provide useful guidelines for the selection of pathology tests and to facilitate interpretation of results.

The Manual consists of several sections:

- Clinical Problems
- Pathology Tests
- Pathology Decision Support Tools

## Clinical Problems

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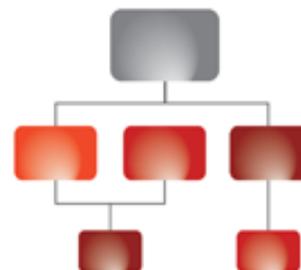
## Pathology Tests

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## Pathology Decision Support Tools

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*The RCPA wishes to acknowledge the Australian Government Department of Health for their generous support of the RCPA Manual. ISSN 1449-8219*

> **Acknowledgements**

> **Foreword / history of the Manual**

> **Publication details**

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Page last updated: 12/8/2015 2:26 PM  
RCPA Manual last revised: 9/02/2015 9:00 AM



- Understanding your tests

- Coping with discomfort and anxiety

- Reading your results

- How samples are collected

- Why identification is important

- Test accuracy and reliability

- Accuracy, precision, specificity & sensitivity

- Quality

- Reference ranges and what they mean

- Laboratory accreditation - the basis for confidence

- Role of testing

- Validation, use and interpretation

- How can you be sure information is trustworthy?

- Safe web searching

- Misleading or inappropriate tests

- Radiology

- Inside the lab

- Inside the lab

- Follow a sample

-  [Blood sample](#)

-  [Throat culture](#)

-  [Laboratory methods](#)

-  [People in labs](#)

-  [Pathologists](#)

-  [Scientists](#)

-  [Pathology disciplines](#)

-  [Anatomical pathology](#)

-  [Histopathology](#)

-  [Tissue preparation](#)

-  [Techniques](#)

-  [Frozen sections](#)

-  [Cytopathology](#)

-  [Pathologists](#)

-  [Related pages](#)

-  [Sources](#)

-  [Genetic testing](#)

-  [The basics](#)

-  [Clinical testing](#)

-  [Pharmacogenomics](#)

-  [Identity testing](#)

-  [Parentage testing](#)

- Tissue typing
- Cytogenetics
- Infectious disease testing
- Pros and cons
- The future
- Related links

▾ Blood banking

- Donating blood
- Protecting supply
- Ensuring proper use
- Patient identification
- Risks
- Related links

■ News

- ▾ Pathology News
- ▾ Site News
- ▾ Supporter News

■ Test information

- ▾ Tests
- ▾ Conditions / diseases
- ▾ Health checks

o [Glossary](#)

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### How to read your pathology results

More people are receiving their test results from their doctors but reading them can be confusing. Here are some pointers to help

[Learn More...](#)

search boxes below.

[Learn More...](#)

### Worried? reference ranges?

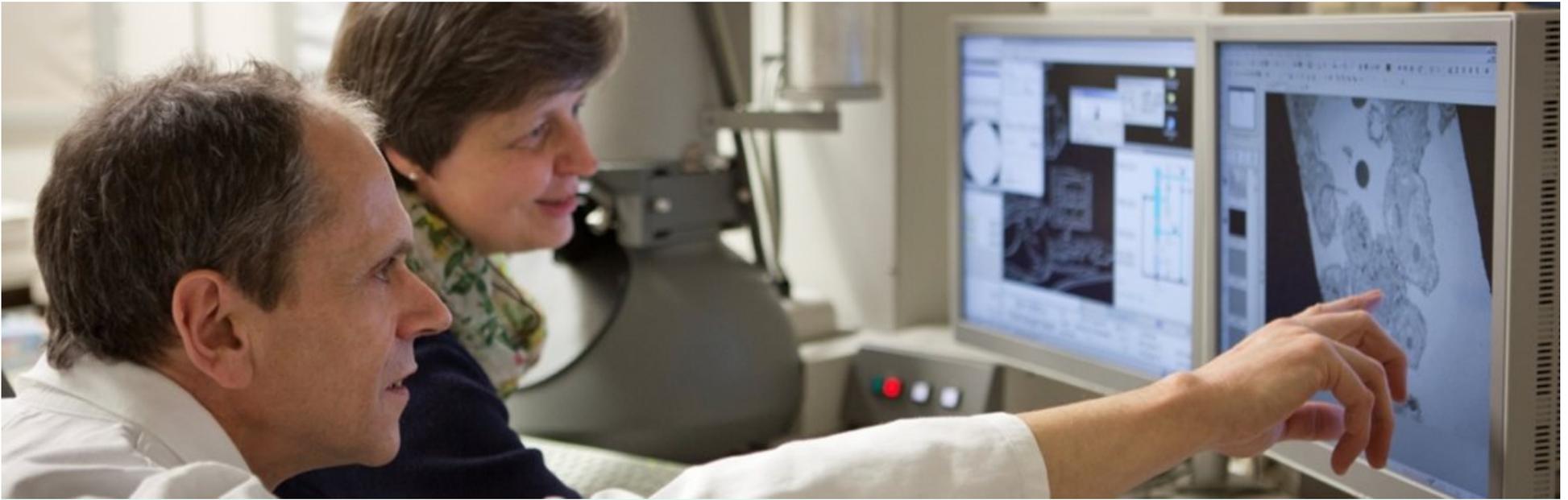
If having a lab test makes you anxious or embarrassed, we have some tips on how to make the experience less stressful.

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[Prev](#)

[Next](#)





Update

Liquid Bi

12 Nov 2015

"Liquid biop

Changes

Find an explanation of your pathology test

Keyword:

Pathology news

05 Oct 2015 Test name

The Australian National Prescriber Service (NPS) have just announced forthcoming changes to the cervical cancer screening program in Australia. The current screening program using PAP smears will be replaced by screening for human papilloma virus (HPV). ... [Full story](#)

### Condition and test just added to site

05 Nov 2015 Condition/Disease

Two new articles added to the site today: the Condition - myasthenia gravis and the related Test - Acetylcholine receptor (AChR) antibody... [Full story](#)

### November edition of ePathWay released

25 Nov 2015

Rock royalty celebrates IPD, faecal pathogens, B12/folate and safeguarding donor organs and tissue... [Full story](#)

### Learn why pathology testing is so important

05 Nov 2015

Keep up to date with Know Pathology, Know Healthcare News... [Full story](#)

### healthdirect app launched today

29 Oct 2015

The healthdirect mobile app is designed to help people make health decisions quickly, safely and easily. Importantly, it provides consumers with an easy way to access information partner content on a mobile device. ... [Full story](#)

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Supporter news

## Our App Having a blood test Know Pathology Medical Scientists



Why you can trust us and whenever you need



Thank you to The Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne 70% of medical decisions are based on lab tests What do Medical Scientists do?





Find out how we find your diagnosis



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Rd, Alexandria, NSW 2015

## Rock star and feted journalist add a personal touch to International Pathology Day celebration



*Kirk Pengilly*

Rock star Kirk Pengilly and award winning journalist Elise Worthington are used to the spotlight, but this time their appearance was personal. Both have benefited from the expertise of pathologists and scientists, and they celebrated International Pathology Day (IPD) on November 18 with RCPA Fellows, staff and guests by sharing their individual stories.

INXS guitarist and saxophonist Kirk Pengilly talked about his recent prostate cancer diagnosis.

“When everything else was showing ‘all clear’, my PSA test showed that something was wrong. There’s no doubt that pathology saved my life, so thank you,” he said to the packed house at the RCPA celebration in Sydney.

Pengilly reiterated how important it is to be aware of your own health and to not put off going to the doctor.

“Early diagnosis and the work of pathologists plays a vital role,” he said.

Elise Worthington talked about the impact of living with the inherited BRCA1 gene mutation.

“My pathology test revealed that I was high risk with a 60 to 80 percent chance of developing breast or ovarian cancer in my lifetime. More access to genetic testing is a wonderful thing because it provides people with choices. Pathology testing has given me that choice and I now have a chance at a cancer free future because of what you (pathologists/scientists) do. I’m incredibly grateful,” she said.

Associate Professor Peter Stewart, President of the RCPA, reinforced the message that every person relies on the work of a pathologist, but more often than not, patients don't know how closely involved a pathologist or scientist is in their healthcare or the diagnosis of their conditions.

"If you've ever had a biopsy, a swab or a blood test, then you've seen a pathologist. Pathology is the foundation for the clinical practice of medicine and the work of pathologists and scientists paves the way to the appropriate diagnosis, management and treatment of diseases."

A/Prof Stewart said the RCPA was fortunate to have the support of individuals such as Pengilly and Worthington to help demonstrate the face and result of pathology testing and diagnosis.

"By sharing stories and building awareness of pathology, we are informing patients and also securing the future of our healthcare system for generations to come."

[« Back to Home Page](#)

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Rock star royalty and champagne may have been part of the International Pathology Day (IPD) celebrations at the RCPA's Sydney headquarters last week, but business items were on the agenda as well. One item was the release of a new [position statement](#) clarifying the use and interpretation of vitamin B12 and folate testing for diagnosing and monitoring deficiency.

The position statement provides guidance to clinicians in the context of the recent changes in the Australian Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS). Vitamin B12 and folate tests were previously linked to the same MBS item numbers, but are now listed as separate items. So when should these tests be requested?

"We recommend that vitamin B12 and folate deficiencies should only be suspected in patients with neuropsychiatric symptoms, haematological disorders, malabsorption, type 1 diabetes, in the malnourished and undernourished, or in patients taking proton pump inhibitors long term," explains Dr Michael Harrison, Vice President of the RCPA.

"Testing for vitamin B12 or folate deficiencies in patients with non-specific symptoms, such as weakness and tiredness is not recommended. As risk factors for vitamin B12 and folate deficiency do not generally overlap, levels should not be routinely requested together, except in suspected malabsorption."

Dr Harrison says vitamin B12 and folate tests are not conducted as routine screening, and cases of deficiency are uncommon.

“Although rare, severe untreated vitamin B12 deficiency can lead to permanent neurological damage, and maternal folate deficiency is linked to fetal neural tube defects. Many vitamin B12 or folate deficient patients have no clinical signs and their Full Blood Count (FBC) is often normal, including normal haemoglobin levels and a normal Mean Corpuscular Volume.”

Dr Harrison advises that follow up testing should only occur in the presence of haematological abnormalities, via a FBC/reticulocyte count at one week and one month to confirm normalisation of counts.

You can read the full position statement [here](#).

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In response, the RCPA's position statement provides new recommendations for faecal pathogen screening to prevent unnecessary testing, treatment and anxiety for patients.

"The role of both *Dientamoeba fragilis* and *Blastocystis* species as gastrointestinal pathogens is highly controversial. These organisms have been difficult to identify by microscopy in the laboratory. It is only due to the recent introduction of DNA-based diagnostic methods, referred to as PCR, that we now know these organisms are much more common than previously thought," explains Dr Harsha Sheorey, spokesperson on faecal pathogens for the RCPA.

Currently, 16% of all faeces test positive by PCR for *D. fragilis* in Australian labs. Children younger than 10 years are also four times more likely to have this organism in their faeces than adults.

These organisms are also found in the faeces of both symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals, and in a number of animal species around the world.

"The PCR techniques have led to unnecessary diagnoses and the over treatment of these two organisms. This results in needless anxiety amongst patients and parents, and can even cause possible harm due to the disruption of the normal flora from the use of antibiotics as treatment. In

addition, laboratories are being asked to 'test for clearance' in asymptomatic patients, adding to the cost and time of pathology testing with no clinical benefit," explains Dr Sheorey.

You can read the full guideline [here](#).

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## Pathologists have a 'safeguarding' role in organ and tissue donation



[DonateLife Thank You Day](#) was observed last Sunday (November 22) to give Australians the opportunity to honour organ and tissue donors and their families by simply saying 'thank you'. It was hot on the heels of International Pathology Day (November 18), so we thought we'd look at the vital yet often invisible role of pathologists in the organ and tissue donation process.

"Pathologists ensure donor tissues and organs are suitable for transplantation, and we make sure there is no compromise to the deceased person in terms of organ and tissue retrieval processes not interfering with coronial cases or processes," explains Dr Heinrich Bouwer, forensic pathologist at the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine.

He says if the donor is part of a coronial case, then the pathologist advises which tissues and organs can be retrieved according to the circumstances of each case to ensure the process is not compromised in any way.

If it is a natural death and a death certificate has been issued, Dr Bouwer says pathologists ensure there are no disease processes that could compromise the transplant.

"For example, if cardiac valves have been removed, we check the remaining heart tissue for evidence of diseased tissue that could cause a problem. Every donor's blood is also screened for blood borne viruses such as HIV, and forensic pathologists examine the donor's brain to ensure there is no pathology present such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy [mad cow disease] and other connective tissue disorders that could compromise a transplant."

Ensuring every donor doesn't have an underlying disease process is vital when you consider the types of organs and tissues that can be transplanted such as:

- lungs
- kidneys
- hearts
- livers
- small intestine
- corneal tissue
- upper arm bone (humerus)
- heart valves
- rib bones
- skin
- pelvic bone (iliac crest)
- hip bone (femoral head)
- femur
- knee cap bone and tendon (patella tendon)
- fibrocartilage cushion in the knee joint (meniscus)
- tibia
- achilles tendon
- anterior tibialis tendon (in the foot).

Organ and tissue donations can only occur through the generosity of families who have lost loved ones – often in sudden and tragic circumstances. Once they consent, pathologists ensure coronial requirements are met and there are no disease processes that could compromise the transplant process. Their often-invisible safeguarding role is clearly vital, and helps facilitate thousands of successful transplants every year.

Purpose-built multi-tissue bank opens in Victoria

The newly upgraded [Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria](#) (DTBV) opened last month with facilities that sound like a sci-fi movie wish list.

Apart from its core function of providing Australian surgeons with tissue grafts for transplantation, the DTBV has:

- the capacity to incorporate next-generation tissue transplant products, including those using human stem cells
- a lyophilisation unit to provide freeze dried bone grafts that can be stored at room temperature on hospital shelves for use at short notice
- the capacity for a national reserve of tissue
- dedicated cell culture suites
- the capacity to enable new tissue products to be manufactured into grafts for patients.

Intrigued? Then take a [virtual tour](#) of the DTBV for a behind-the-scenes look at this state-of-the-art tissue banking facility.

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