



Pathology point of care

COOTAMUNDRA District Hospital has introduced a new point of care testing program that will give ED patients faster access to pathology results and improve overall care.

NSW Health Pathology is leading the state-wide effort to introduce the managed point of care testing (PoCT) scheme in public hospital emergency departments that don't have access to 24-hour pathology laboratories on-site.

The aim is to provide ED teams, particularly in regional and rural areas, with access to on-the-spot results for certain types of pathology tests so they can deliver more timely care for patients.

The Murrumbidgee Local Health District is the latest to adopt the program and is working with Pathology West (one of five NSW Health Pathology Networks) to introduce 43 devices across 27 emergency departments by the end of April 2014.

Cootamundra District Hospital will introduce one new device to support patient care from today.

The hand-held PoCT devices provide on-site analysis for blood gases, lactate, haemoglobin, troponin, chemistries and electrolytes and INR/PT – some of the most common pathology tests emergency department teams rely on.

Cootamundra Health Service Manager Jenny Apps said that until recently Cootamundra District Hospital had to send pathology samples off-site for analysis.

“By having reliable point of care devices within the ED, we can get faster results for certain pathology tests, which means we can make quicker clinical decisions and improve time to treatment,” Ms Apps said.

“We can also save travel time for some patients, and that's something they really appreciate.”

Dr Michael Whiley, Acting Director for Pathology West (the NSW Health Pathology network that services the Murrumbidgee LHD) said point of care testing contributes to better health care by significantly reducing turnaround time for some

types of pathology tests.

“Point of care testing will never replace the full-fledged pathology laboratory which will continue to perform more detailed analysis and more technically advanced tests,” he explained.

“However, technology has advanced to a stage that we can now bring some parts of the pathology laboratory to the patient.”

Dr Whiley said clinical teams will be able to have confidence in the PoCT results, as the hand-held devices will be managed to the same quality systems as traditional laboratory instruments.

The state-wide PoCT pathology rollout has been funded through a \$5million grant from the COAG's National Partnerships Agreement Emergency Department capital program.

In addition to providing PoCT devices for small EDs, the program also includes:

- training for ED staff to ensure the devices are used properly,
- technical support and ongoing monitoring for devices, and
- software that will enable results to be electronically transmitted to pathology laboratory information systems and ultimately to a patient's electronic medical records.

NSW Health Pathology aims to provide new devices to roughly 150 emergency departments by June 2014 and integrate existing devices already used in another 110 EDs into the managed PoCT service.

Susan Weisser Chief Executive for Murrumbidgee Local Health District, said some ED's in the Murrumbidgee LHD already use some type of point of care device but the devices are different, offer a different range of tests and aren't networked.

“The managed PoCT strategy will increase reliability, consistency and accuracy of tests across the district,” Ms Weisser said.



■ **HEALTH ADVANCEMENT:** Pictured (from left) are Sue McGlynn, Ray Godbier, Don Hearn, Jenny Apps and Louise Vance at the Cootamundra District Hospital on Tuesday. The hospital has introduced a new point of care testing program that will give ED patients faster access to pathology results.