

HQCA to conduct pathology review at Royal Alexandra Hospital

Dec 02, 2011

The Health Quality Council of Alberta will review interpretation errors of pathology tests that took place at the Royal Alexandra Hospital (RAH) laboratory between July and September of this year.

p>During that period, 159 prostate biopsy slides were interpreted by a pathologist working at the RAH and subsequently some urologists raised concerns about their accuracy. Alberta Health Services (AHS) has since retested 126 of the 159 biopsies. The re-tests have found significant discrepancies in 29 of them which may result in a different diagnosis or course of treatment for some patients. The pathologist is no longer practicing for AHS and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta is aware of this matter.

“It is important to me that the patients involved and all Albertans are confident that their physicians have the most accurate information available in order to diagnose and treat them,” said Fred Horne, Minister of Health and Wellness.

“This issue appears to relate to the practice of one physician who is no longer reading pathology specimens,” added Horne. “While I have no concerns about the quality of testing at the present time, I have directed both AHS and the HQCA to provide me with regular updates throughout the process. In the event any further steps are required to improve the reading and interpretation of pathology results, we will be in a position to take immediate action.”

The patients whose tests were re-read are being contacted by AHS. Patients will be able to book appointments with their urologists on an expedited basis to review results and adjust treatment plans as necessary.

“Patient safety is our first priority. We contacted the urologists for all of the patients involved when we became aware of these concerns and asked them to delay any treatment or therapy until each patient’s biopsy was re-read,” said Dr. Chris Eagle, AHS President and CEO. “Patients with urgent cases or treatment plans had their slides re-read first to allow physicians to respond quickly.”

While there is no indication of discrepancies in other tests, AHS is in the process of reviewing 1,568 additional non-prostate specimens that were interpreted by the pathologist during that period. They will be reviewed on a priority basis.

An AHS information line has been created for patients who have questions or concerns about their biopsy tests at RAH in the past six months. The number is 1-866-301-2668.

Backgrounder: Details on Royal Alexander Hospital Review

Media inquiries may be directed to:

To call toll-free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

Details on Royal Alexandra Hospital pathology review

Of the 159 biopsies under review how many are inaccurate?

Re-reads are complete in 126 of the biopsies. The additional 33 are expected to be complete next week.

- In 51 of the 126 cases, there are no discrepancies with the initial pathologist's report. There is no change in diagnosis.
- In 46 of the 126 cases, there are minor discrepancies with the initial pathologist's report. Minor changes are those that have no effect on overall diagnosis and which will not likely alter treatment and management.
- In 29 of the 126 cases, there are more significant discrepancies with the initial pathologist's report. Of these, 14 involve the original pathologist underestimating the aggressiveness of prostate cancer and 15 involve the initial read missing one or two isolated areas of very small numbers of cancer cells in the initial reading of the samples.

How will Albertans who have had biopsies read at the Royal Alex know if they need another consultation with their urologist or further testing?

AHS is notifying all affected patients. For those where the discrepancies may result in a change in diagnosis or treatment plan, urologists will contact the patients directly. Patients who have had biopsy tests at the RAH within the last six months and have questions or concerns can call 1-866-301-2668.

When will the re-read of the 1,568 additional specimens be complete?

While there is no evidence of discrepancies, AHS will be reviewing all 1,568 specimens read by the pathologist at the RAH. It will take some time to complete all 1,568 re-reads, however, priority will be assigned to all cancer-related specimens or for those individuals who have surgical procedures booked. The most urgent cases will be re-read first. Lung biopsy reviews, for example, will be prioritized over gall bladder or vasectomy reviews.

How can Albertans be sure that the interpretation of their biopsies is accurate?

Albertans should know that there are safeguards in place to ensure the accuracy of their biopsies. In fact, AHS has set a target of 10% for reviewing a random sample of all biopsies. The Royal Alexandra Hospital review rate for the first 6 months of 2011 is 9.58%. Although there is no

established review rate in Canada, Alberta's standard is higher than a College of American Pathologists study which found an aggregate review rate of 8.2% in the United States.

Is the pathologist still practicing at the Royal Alexandra Hospital?

The pathologist is no longer practicing with AHS and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta is engaged in this review.

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Media inquiries may be directed to:

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