Establishing Molecular Testing in Clinical Laboratory Environments; Approved Guideline

This guideline provides comprehensive guidance for planning and implementation of molecular diagnostic testing, including strategic planning, regulatory requirements, implementation, quality management, and special considerations for the subspecialties of molecular genetics, infectious diseases, oncology, and pharmacogenetics.

A guideline for global application developed through the Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute consensus process.
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Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute  
950 West Valley Road, Suite 2500  
Wayne, PA 19087 USA  
P: +1.610.688.0100  
F: +1.610.688.0700  
www.clsi.org  
standard@clsi.org
Establishing Molecular Testing in Clinical Laboratory Environments; Approved Guideline

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Leslie Hall, MMSc, M(ASCP)
Jean Amos Wilson, PhD, FACMG, CGMB
Kathy Bernard, MSc, ARM(CCM)
Michele P. Carbone, MS, CLS(ASCP) SH
Haja Sittana El Mubarak, PhD
Stephanie E. Hallam, PhD, FACMG, MBA
Roger D. Klein, MD, JD, FCAP
Preeti Pancholi, PhD, D(ABMM)
Michele M. Schoonmaker, PhD
Elaine B. Spector, PhD, FACMG
Patrik Vitazka, MD, PhD
Jerry Boonyaratankornkit, MS
Bonita Bryant, MT(ASCP), CLSpMB(NCA)
Jianli Dong, MD, PhD, FACMG
Rajyasree Emmadi, MD, FCAP
Manohar R. Furtado, PhD
Felicitas Lacbawan, MD, FCAP, FACMG
Francisco Martinez-Murillo, PhD
Ted E. Schutzbank, PhD, D(ABMM)
Rangaraj Selvarangan, BVSc, PhD, D(ABMM)
Venkatakrishna Shyamala, PhD
Laurina O. Williams, PhD, MPH
Alan Wu, PhD, DABCC

Abstract

Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute document MM19-A—Establishing Molecular Testing in Clinical Laboratory Environments; Approved Guideline provides a framework for decision making and implementation of clinical molecular diagnostics, and is intended for those in established clinical laboratories that are implementing a molecular program for the first time. When implementing any diagnostic test for patient care, many elements should be addressed before the test is brought “online.” This document focuses on the path of workflow, including laboratory safety and the quality management system, with emphasis on considerations for molecular diagnostics. An organized approach to strategic planning with SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) is presented. Relevant regulatory requirements and the implementation plan are discussed in detail.

Importantly, separate sections are devoted to each of the following subspecialty areas: heritable diseases, oncology and malignant hematology, pharmacogenomics, and infectious diseases. Each of these sections addresses special considerations for molecular testing for each subspecialty.


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Committee Membership

Consensus Committee on Molecular Methods

Roberta M. Madej, CLS, MS, MBA
Chairholder
Cepheid
Sunnyvale, California, USA

Lisa Kalman, PhD
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Zivana Tezak-Fragale, PhD
FDA Center for Devices and Radiological Health
Silver Spring, Maryland, USA

Frederick S. Nolte, PhD
Vice-Chairholder
Medical University of South Carolina
Charleston, South Carolina, USA

Penny Keller, BS, MP(ASCP)
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
Baltimore, Maryland, USA

Jean Amos Wilson, PhD, FACMG, CGMB
Berkeley HeartLab, Inc.
Alameda, California, USA

Stephen P. Day, PhD
Hologic, Inc.
Madison, Wisconsin, USA

Deborah Payne, PhD
APP-Uni-Path
Denver, Colorado, USA

Emily S. Winn-Deen, PhD
Illumina, Inc.
San Diego, California, USA

Document Development Committee on Establishing Molecular Testing in Clinical Laboratory Environments

Leslie Hall, MMSc, M(ASCP)
Co-Chairholder
Mayo Clinic
Rochester, Minnesota, USA

Roger D. Klein, MD, JD, FCAP
BloodCenter of Wisconsin
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

Staff
Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute
Wayne, Pennsylvania, USA

Jean Amos Wilson, PhD,
FACMG, CGMB
Co-Chairholder
Berkeley HeartLab, Inc.
Alameda, California, USA

Preeti Pancholi, PhD, D(ABMM)
The Ohio State University Medical Center
Columbus, Ohio, USA

Luann Ochs, MS
Vice President, Standards Development

Kathy Bernard, MSc, ARM(CCM)
National Microbiology Laboratory, PHAC
Winnipeg, Canada

Tracy A. Dooley, BS, MLT(ASCP)
Staff Liaison

Michele P. Carbone, MS,
CLS(ASCP) SH
Redondo Beach, California, USA

Michele M. Schoonmaker, PhD
Cepheid
Sunnyvale, California, USA

Marie Hackenbrack, MCM,
M(ASCP), BA
Project Manager

Haja Sittana El Mubarak, PhD
FDA Center for Devices and Radiological Health
Silver Spring, Maryland, USA

Elaine B. Spector, PhD, FACMG
University of Colorado Denver,
School of Medicine
Aurora, Colorado, USA

Megan P. Larrisey, MA
Editor

Stephanie E. Hallam, PhD,
FACMG, MBA
Good Start Genetics
Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Patrik Vitazka, MD, PhD
Merck Sharp & Dohme Idea, Inc.
Bratislava, Slovakia
# Acknowledgment

CLSI and the Consensus Committee on Molecular Methods gratefully acknowledge the following individuals for their help in preparing this document:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution/Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jerry Boonyaratanakornkit, MS</td>
<td>Franciso Martinez-Murillo, PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AcroMetrix Corporation</td>
<td>FDA Center for Devices and Radiological Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benicia, California, USA</td>
<td>Silver Spring, Maryland, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonita Bryant, MT(ASCP), CLSpMB(NCA)</td>
<td>Ted E. Schutzbank, PhD, D(ABMM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access Genetics</td>
<td>Covance Central Laboratory Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA</td>
<td>Indianapolis, Indiana, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jianli Dong, MD, PhD, FACMG</td>
<td>Rangaraj Selvarangan, BVSc, PhD, D(ABMM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Texas Medical Branch</td>
<td>Children’s Mercy Hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galveston, Texas, USA</td>
<td>Kansas City, Missouri, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajyasree Emmadi, MD, FCAP</td>
<td>Venkatakrishna Shyamala, PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Illinois At Chicago</td>
<td>Consultant, Molecular Diagnostics and Blood Screening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago, Illinois, USA</td>
<td>North Potomac, Maryland, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manohar R. Furtado, PhD</td>
<td>Laurina O. Williams, PhD, MPH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Technologies/Applied Biosystems</td>
<td>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster City, California, USA</td>
<td>Atlanta, Georgia, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicitas Lacbawan, MD, FCAP, FACMG</td>
<td>Alan Wu, PhD, DABCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAP Biochemical and Molecular Genetics</td>
<td>San Francisco General Hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subcommittee</td>
<td>San Francisco, California, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northfield, Illinois, USA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CLSI and the Consensus Committee on Molecular Methods gratefully acknowledge the following individuals for their help in preparing Section 11.1.5.6, Chimerism Testing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Institution/Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Douglas A. Bost, BA</td>
<td>Ian J. McLaughlin, BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celera Corporation</td>
<td>Celera Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alameda, California, USA</td>
<td>Alameda, California, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan Capper, BA, CHS(ABHI)</td>
<td>Celera Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alameda, California, USA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Foreword

This guideline was written in response to the growing migration of common molecular diagnostic tests from solely esoteric laboratories to the more routine clinical environment. Molecular assays are becoming more attractive to routine clinical laboratories based on the availability of *in vitro* diagnostic devices and the relative ease of their implementation. Incorporating molecular testing into the routine menu decreases the need for sendouts, thus improving turnaround time and the financial health of the laboratory.

Key Words

Molecular diagnostics, molecular genetics, molecular hematopathology, molecular infectious disease, molecular regulatory requirements, strategic planning, unidirectional workflow
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1 Scope

This document was written by experienced molecular laboratory professionals to provide an introduction to molecular diagnostics for nonmolecular, routine clinical laboratories, as well as a framework for decision making and implementation of molecular testing. The target audience of this guideline is the stakeholders who play a role in the strategic decision to implement a molecular diagnostic program, including the:

- Medical and technical directors who may not have previous experience with molecular testing
- Supervisory technical staff who implement molecular assays for the first time
- Quality management systems (QMS) group who will adapt the quality plan to incorporate the unique aspects of the new program
- Production staff that will perform and maintain all aspects of the assays

Because molecular diagnostics encompasses a very broad area, this document focuses on clinical applications and technologies most likely to be used in a laboratory that is venturing into molecular testing for the first time. The laboratory may have a concentration in a specific subspecialty (eg, microbiology) or not. However, given that this document is written for nonmolecular experts, several more complex areas of molecular testing were excluded from the scope, including:

- Complex technologies, including, but not limited to, laboratory-developed tests (LDTs) that require primer and/or probe design, proteomics, pulsed-field gel electrophoresis, multiple locus sequence testing, and repetitive extragenic palindromic sequence-based polymerase chain reaction (PCR)
- Complex reflex testing algorithms
- Laboratory tests that require a high degree of clinical expertise to interpret, such as donor-recipient compatibility typing, and molecular typing of strains possibly related in an outbreak
- Tests for sexual abuse and forensics
- Tests of the blood and tissue supply (eg, blood banks)

It is also out of the scope of this guideline to consider assays that should remain in specialized or esoteric testing facilities, such as:

- Methods for detecting pathogens such as bioterrorism agents that require biosafety levels (BSL) 3 or greater, which are otherwise handled in specialized facilities
- Prenatal diagnosis and preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) of heritable disease