Communication between the clinical laboratory and its users

Graham H Beastall

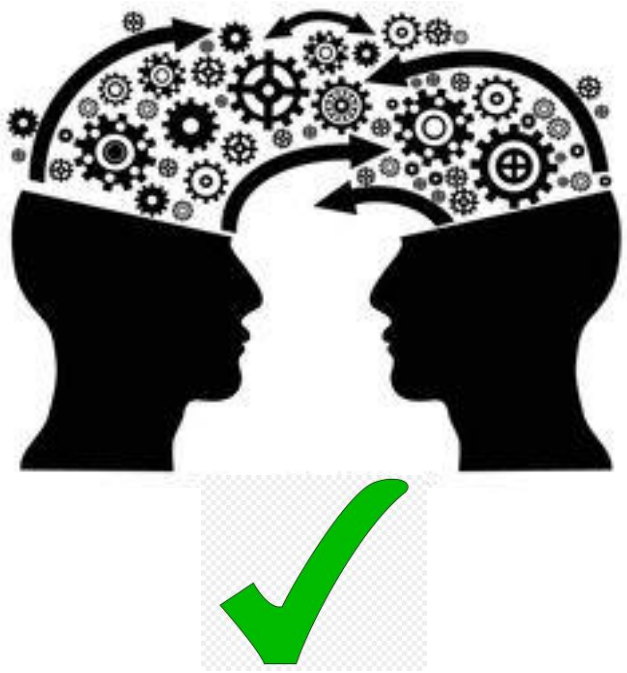
gbeastall@googlemail.com

Outline

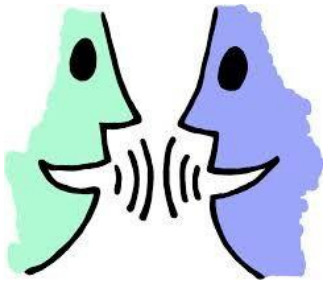
- Introduction
- What to communicate
- When to communicate
- How to communicate
- Final thoughts

Communication: definition

- A **two-way** process of reaching **mutual understanding**, in which participants not only exchange (encode-decode) information, news, ideas and feelings but also **create and share meaning**. In general, communication is a **means of connecting people** or places.



Most common methods of communication

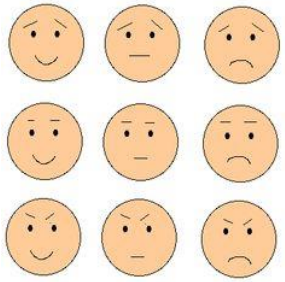


Inter-personal

Written

Communication

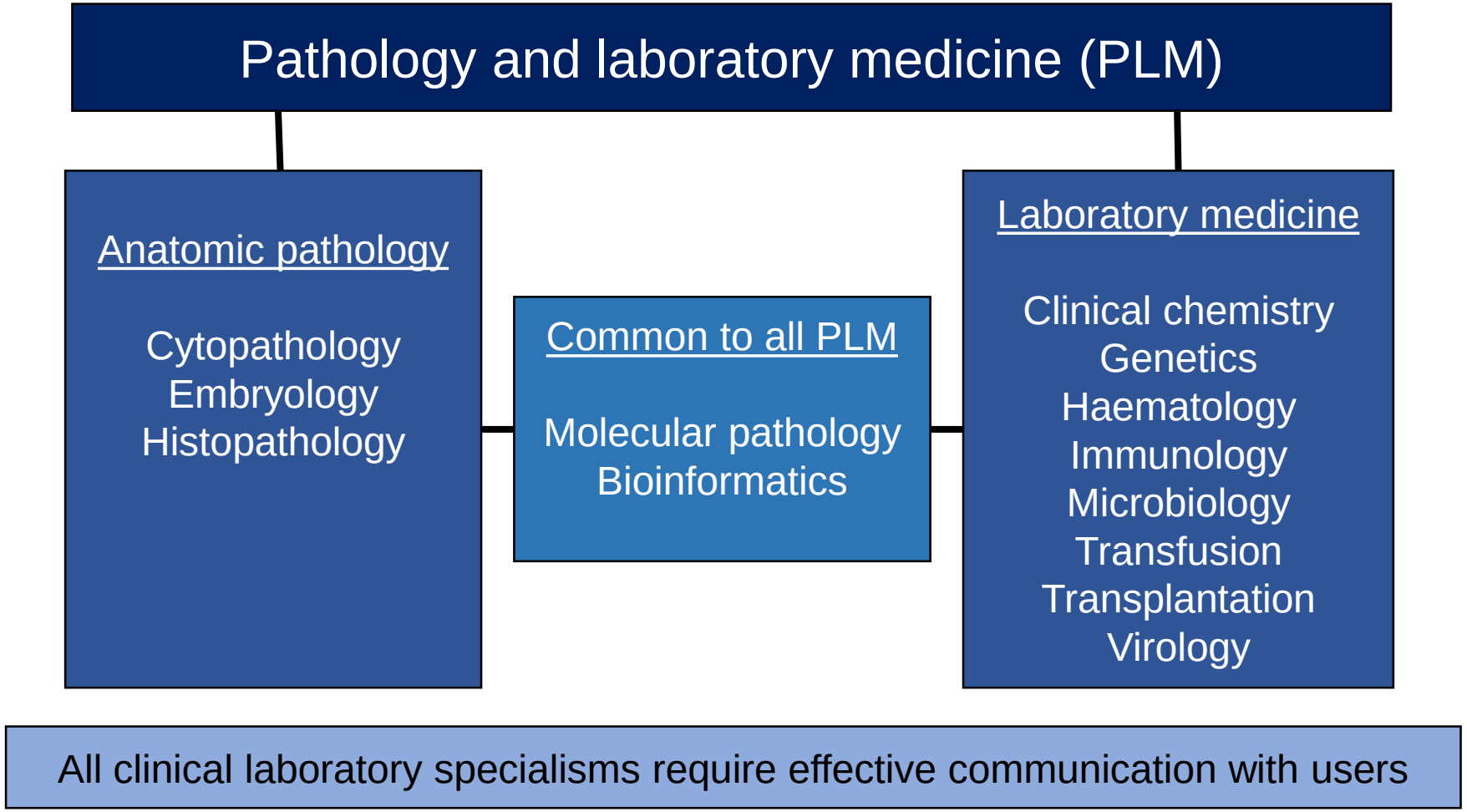
Non-verbal



Oral

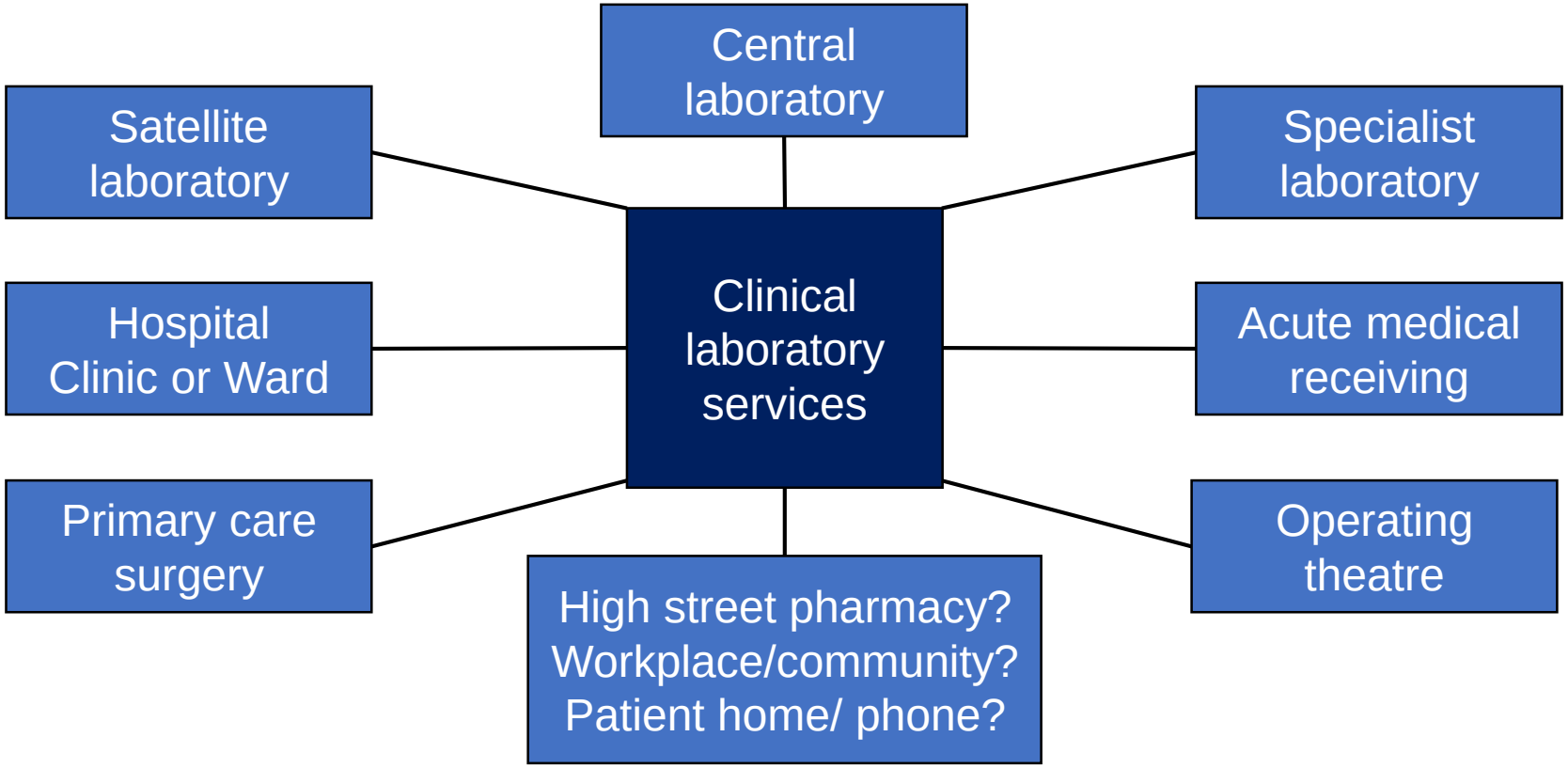
Effective communication includes matching the method to the occasion
Clinical laboratory specialists need to use all methods of communication

Clinical laboratory classification



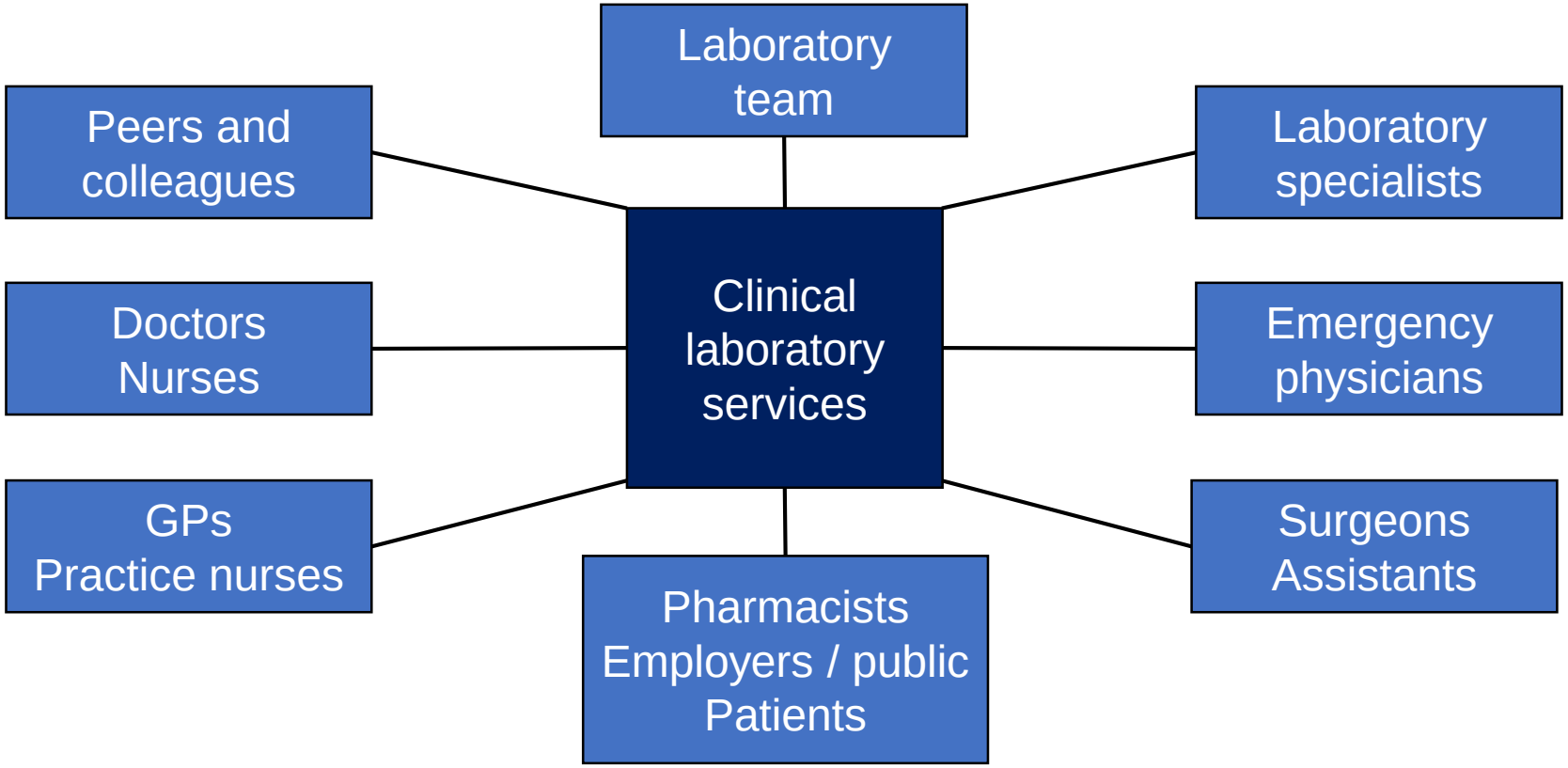
All clinical laboratory specialisms require effective communication with users

Laboratory medicine settings



Clinical laboratory specialists should communicate with users in all settings

Users in different laboratory medicine settings



Clinical laboratory specialists should communicate with all users in these settings

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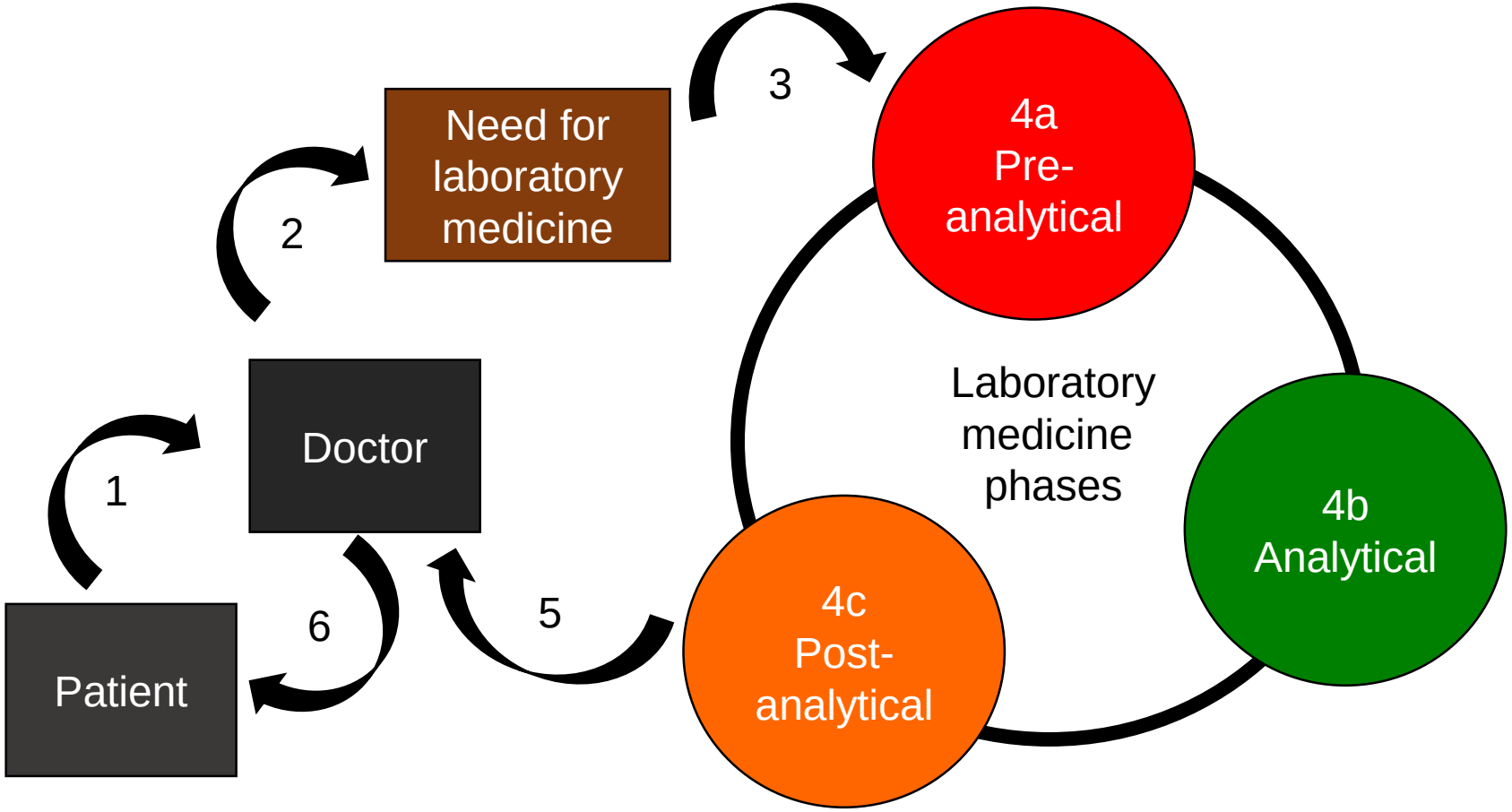
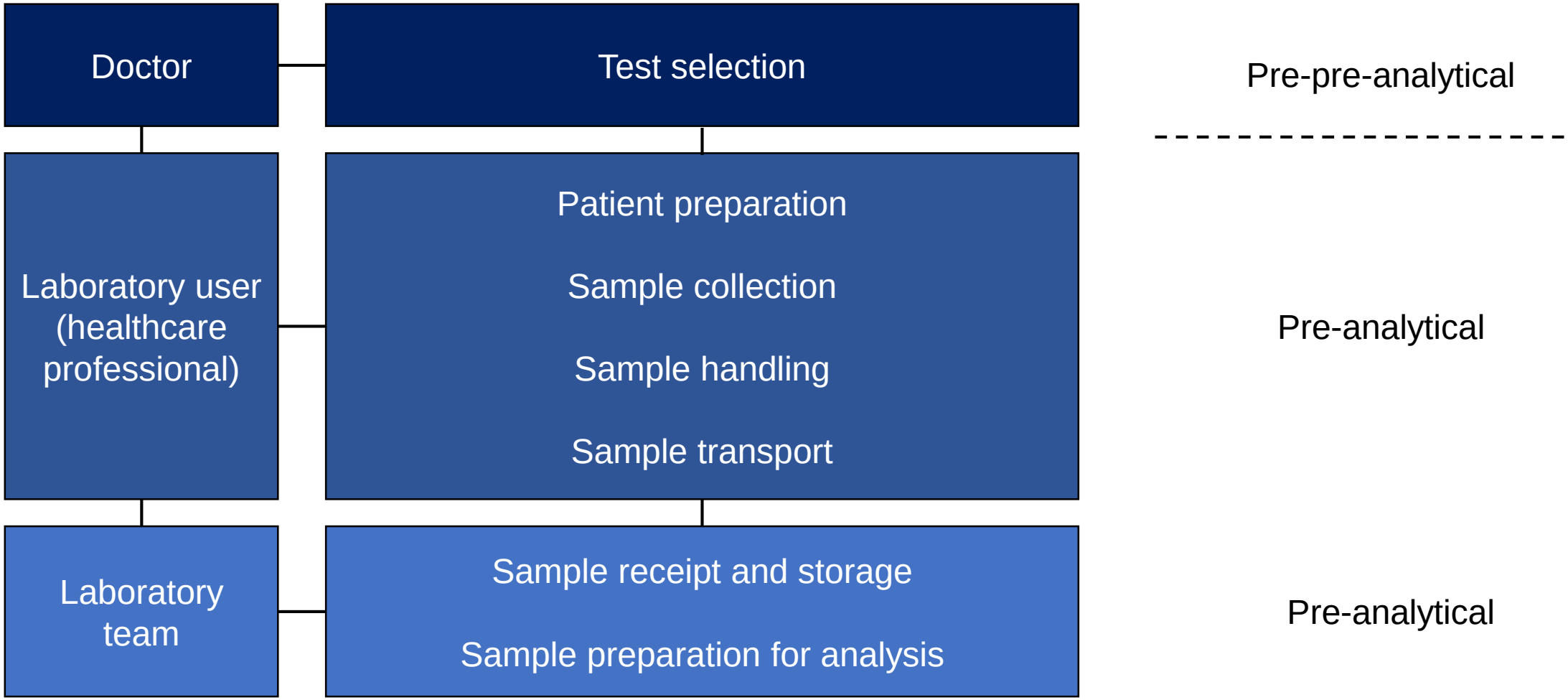
Laboratory medicine: the total testing process (TTP)



Communication with users is required at both the pre-analytical and post-analytical phases

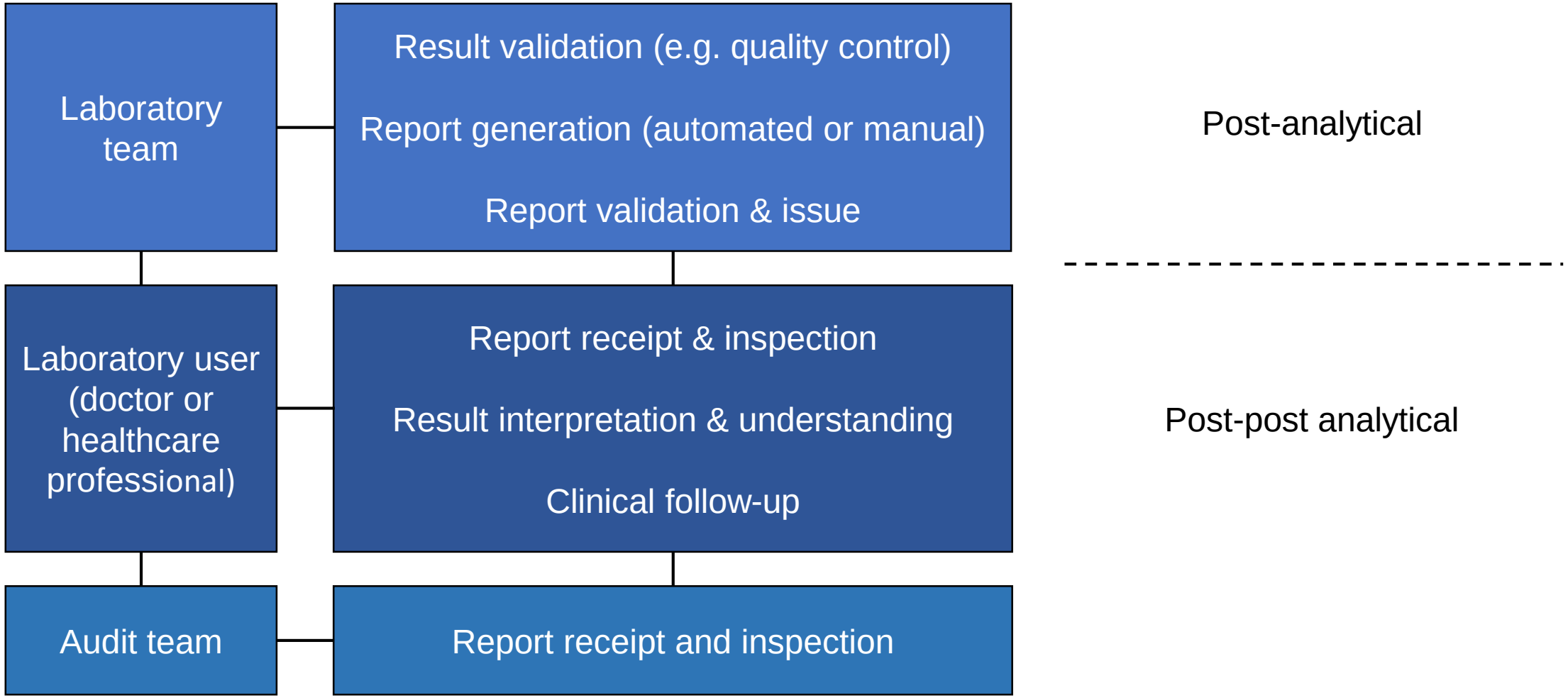
Pre-analytical phase: the basics



Pre-analytical communications

Test selection	Test repertoire with clinical applications
Patient preparation Sample collection Sample handling Sample transport	Patient and specimen identification requirements Reasons for the request (e.g. clinical details) Patient preparation (e.g. fasting, timing) by test Sample tube identification and requirements by test Sampling procedures (e.g. type, volume, order of draw) Transport arrangements (e.g. time, temperature) by test Telephone help line for inquiries
Sample receipt and storage Sample preparation for analysis	Within laboratory communication, procedures etc Lab staff should be aware of communication with lab users

Post-analytical phase: the basics



Post-analytical laboratory communications

Clinical results

- Patient report
  - Date/time/unique identifiers etc
  - Error warnings
  - Results, cumulative where possible
- Interpretation
  - Critical values & urgent results
  - Standard comments
  - Individual clinical comments
- Clinical liaison
  - Reflex or add on tests
  - Follow up investigations

Support information

- Routine
  - Reference intervals
  - Action limits/ outcome indicators
- On request
  - Expected turnaround times
  - Clinical guidelines
  - Quality control
  - Critical difference
  - Telephone helpline
  - Resources e.g. LTOL

Other communications

Extra-laboratory regarding patients

- Face to face clinical settings
  - Wards, clinics, referral centres
  - Primary care centres
  - Multidisciplinary clinical teams
  - Managed clinical networks
- Other settings
  - Patient organisations
  - Community meetings
  - Clinical/scientific meetings: peers

News and information

- Changes and developments
  - Analytical methods/systems
  - Reference intervals / action limits
  - Operational matters
  - Laboratory personnel
- Status
  - Clinical audits
  - Laboratory accreditation
  - Clinical & scientific publications

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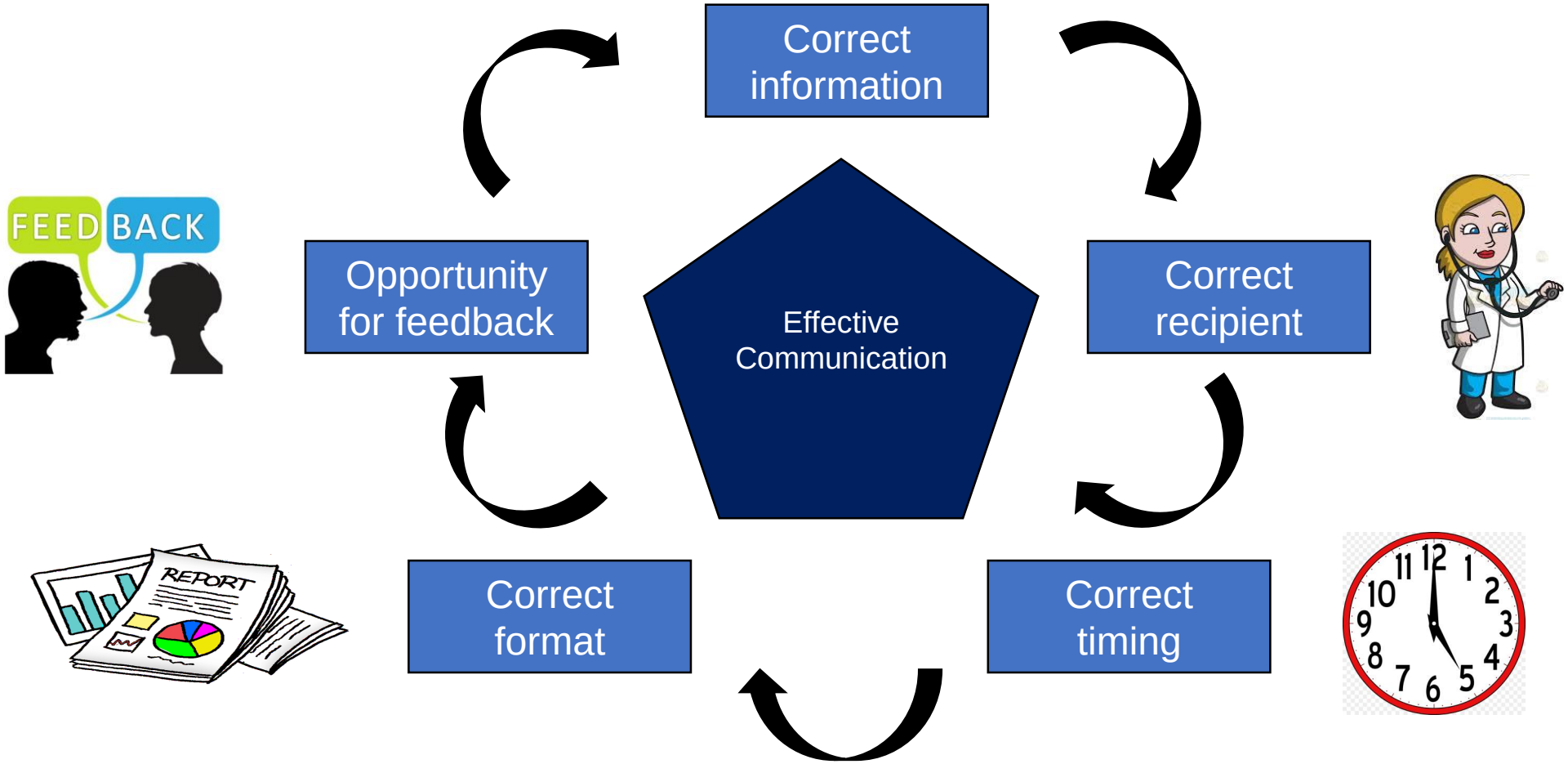
When to communicate



Urgent communications

Regarding individual patients

- Critical values
- Unexpected abnormal results
- Patients in Emergency Department
- Patients in Acute Medical Receiving
- Patients by prior arrangement

Regarding the service

- Unscheduled service interruption
- Identified errors
- Safety alerts

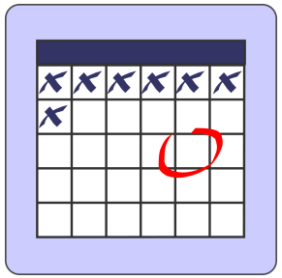
Scheduled communications

Regarding patients

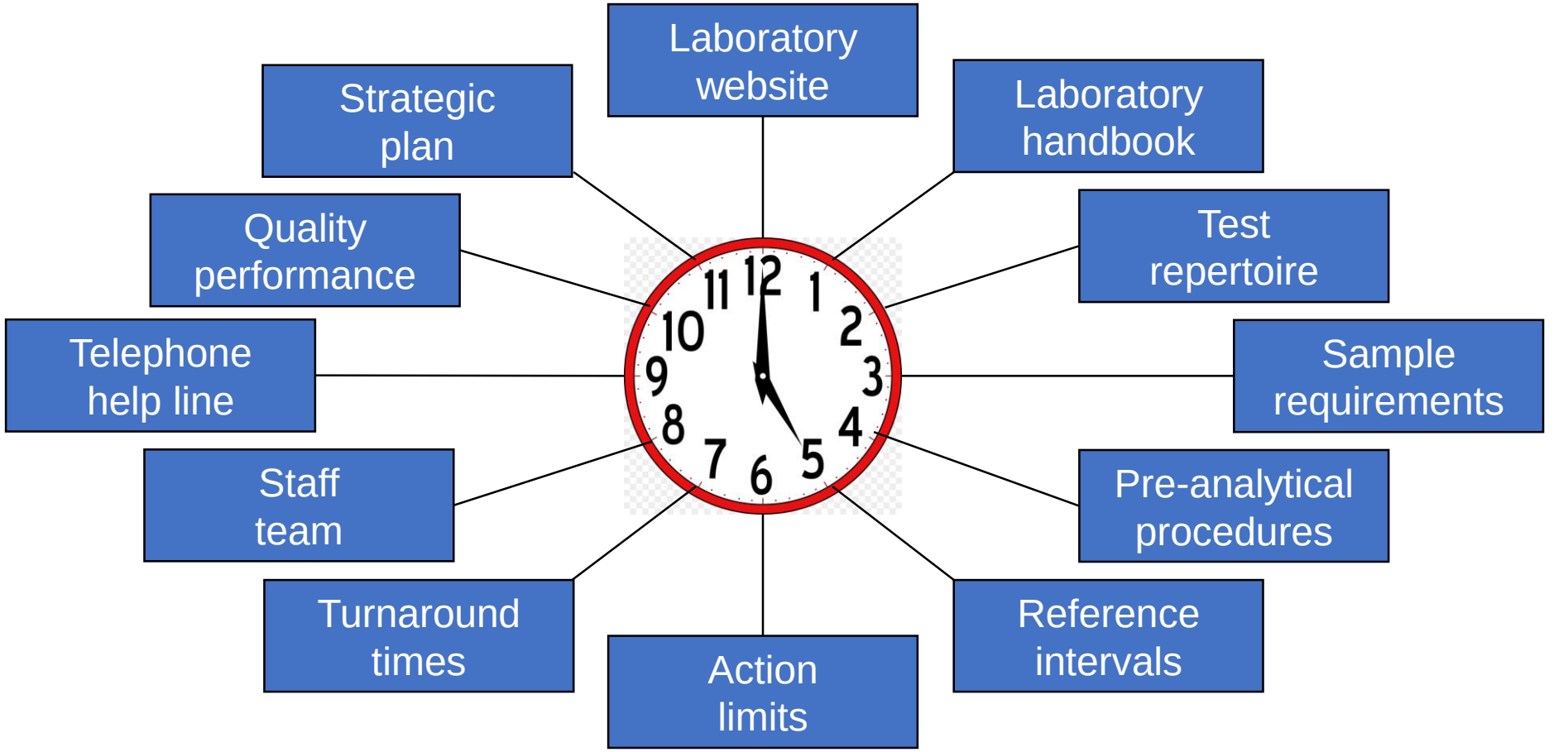
- Routine results service
- Non-urgent interpretation
- Non-urgent clinical liaison
- Extra-laboratory sessions
- Multidisciplinary team meetings

Regarding the service

- Service updates
- Relevant publications
- Relevant clinical guidelines
- Targeted correspondence
- News updates



Information that is always available



Depending on the healthcare system laboratory costs may also be included in this list

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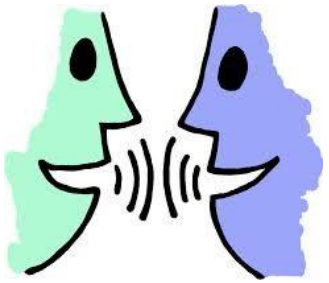
Methods of communication: laboratory medicine



Inter-personal

Written

Communication

Electronic

Oral

Effective communication includes matching the method to the occasion
Clinical laboratory specialists need to use all methods of communication

Communication challenge in laboratory medicine

Communication has never been easier.
Modern communications is:

- Global
- Instant
- Inexpensive
- Readily shared
- Multi-media

We all suffer from communication overload.
The trivial can often obscure the important.
Remember effective communication involves:

- Correct information to
- Correct recipient in
- Correct timeframe and in
- Correct format

Communications that should be ‘person to person’

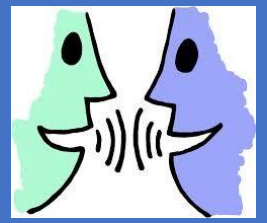
Patient related

- Pre-analytical problems
- Critical values
- Urgent results
- Reflex testing
- Clinical discussion of patient
- Follow-up strategy

Other

- Specific safety issue
- Appropriateness of testing
- Complaints
- Errors

Person to person communications in laboratory medicine can be achieved by various methods.





The urgency of the communication will determine the optimum method

Communications available for users to access

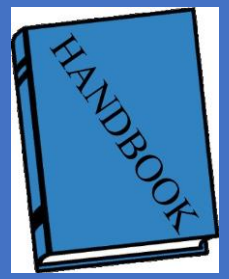
Patient related

- Repertoire
- Sample requirements
- Scheduled results
- Turnaround times
- Operational procedures
- Investigative protocols
- Reference intervals
- Clinical guidelines

Other

- Strategic plan
- Quality performance

Access to scheduled or ‘always available’ information in laboratory medicine can be enabled in various ways.



Laboratory medicine specialists should audit how often key information is accessed.

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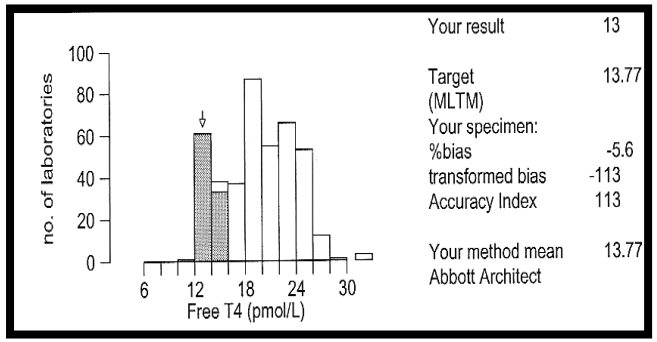
Case study 1

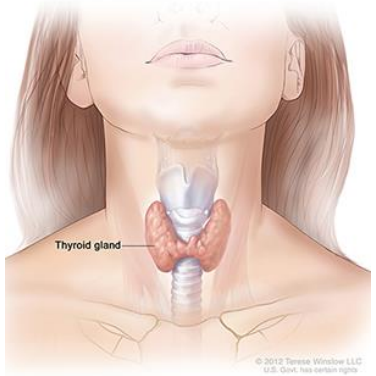
Can I speak with Sarah please?

North Glasgow NHS Trust

General Practitioner Guidelines for using Laboratory Medicine Services

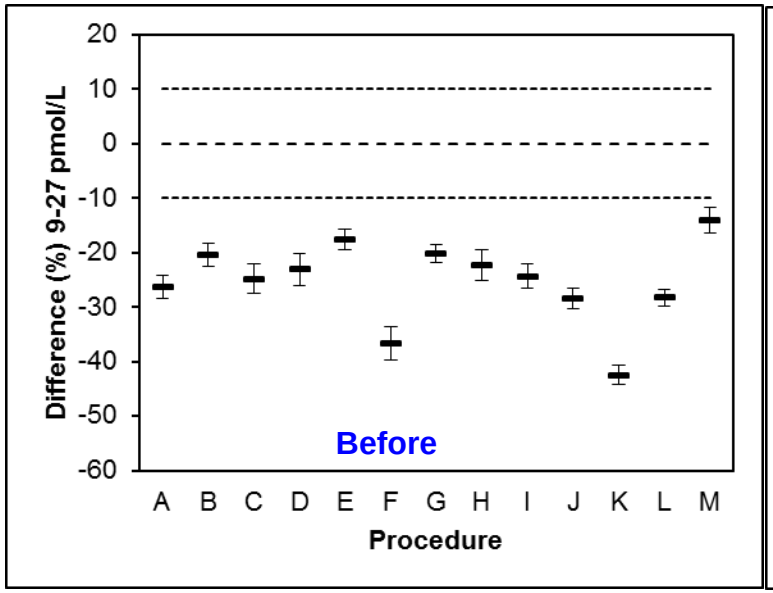
Case study 2

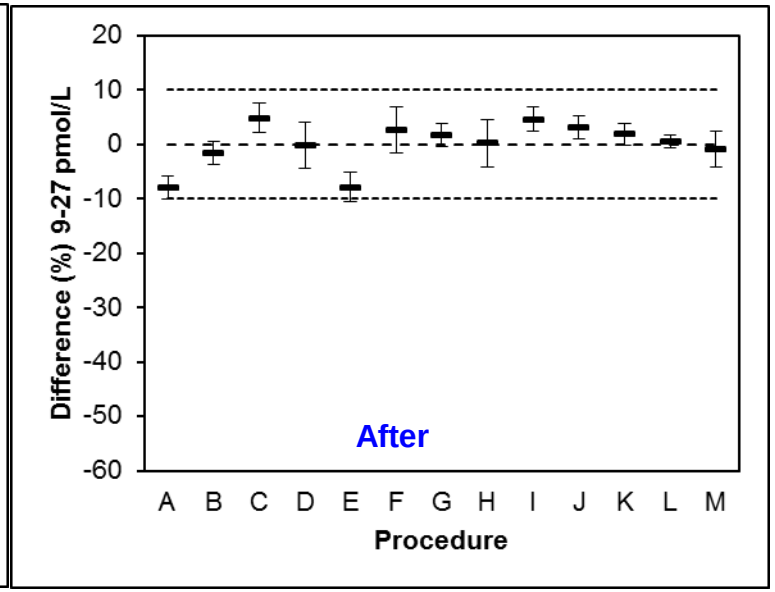

no. of laboratories
100
80
60
40
20
0
6
12
18
24
30
Free T4 (pmol/L)
Your result 13
Target (MLTM) 13.77
Your specimen:
%bias -5.6
transformed bias -113
Accuracy Index 113
Your method mean 13.77
Abbott Architect


Thyroid gland

Summary of Results for FT4

Marked imprecision when FT4 <9pmol/L; can't assess recalibration
Little difference in bias for each assay when FT4 9-27 or >27pmol/L





Standardization would increase FT4 concentrations by 30 – 50%
Major implications for reference ranges and cumulative results

Key message

- YOU are the best person to optimise effective communication to/from your laboratory
- There are no ‘off the shelf’ solutions that work for every laboratory
- Meet with your users on a regular basis. Encourage your staff to do the same
- Spend as much time as possible outside the laboratory networking with users
- Tailor communication methods to meet the knowledge and experience of users
- Audit the effectiveness of your communication on a regular basis
- Effective communication is an essential component of effective leadership

Final thoughts