

# ERNDIM - Quantitative Schemes

## Cystine in White Blood Cells



Dr. M.J. Henderson  
Consultant Paediatric Biochemist  
St. James University Hospital  
Dept. Clinical Biochemistry  
UK – Leeds LS9 7TP  
e-mail: Mick.Henderson@leedsth.nhs.uk

Dr. C.W. Weykamp  
Queen Beatrix Hospital  
MCA Laboratory  
P.O. Box 9005  
NL – 7100 GG Winterswijk  
e-mail : c.w.weykamp@skbwinterswijk.nl

## Annual Report ERNDIM-EQAS 2011

### 1. **Purpose**

The purpose of the ERNDIM External Quality Assurance Scheme for Cystine in White Blood Cells is the monitoring of the analytical quality of the quantitative assay of cystine in white blood cells in the management and diagnosis of patients with cystinosis. For details see [www.erndimga.nl](http://www.erndimga.nl)

### 2. **Participants**

37 Datasets have been submitted by Laboratories from 19 countries.

### 3. **Design**

The Scheme has been designed, planned and co-ordinated by Dr. Mick Henderson as scientific advisor and Dr. Cas Weykamp as scheme organiser, both appointed by the ERNDIM Board. The design includes special attention to sample composition and to the layout of the reports.

### **Samples**

The scheme consisted of 2 series of lyophilised samples: one series containing protein pellets and the other supernatants of lysed white blood cells spiked with cystine. As can be seen from table 1 the weighed amounts of protein and cystine were identical in pairs of samples. The nature, source and added amounts of the analytes are summarised in table 1.

Table 1. Pair identification, source and amount of added analytes.

Analyte	Source	Added Quantities Protein (mg/vial)+Cystine (nmol/vial)			
		Sample Pair 69 - 73	Sample Pair 70 - 75	Sample Pair 71 - 74	Sample Pair 72 - 76
Protein	Serva 11930	1.00	2.00	1.25	1.50
Cystine	Sigma C8755	0.80	1.50	0.40	3.20

## **Reports**

All data-transfer, the submission of data as well as request and viewing of reports proceeded via the interactive website [www.erndimqa.nl](http://www.erndimqa.nl)

An important characteristic of the website is that it supplies short-term and long-term reports.

**Short-term reports** on the eight individual specimens are available two weeks after the submission deadline and provide up-to-date information on analytical performance. Although technically reports could be immediately available a delay time of 14 days has been introduced to enable the scientific advisor to inspect the results and add his comment to the report.

The **annual long-term report** summarises the results of the whole year.

A second important characteristic of the ERNDIM website is the different levels of detail of results which allows individual laboratories the choice of fully detailed and/or summarised reports.

The "Analyte in Detail" is the most detailed report and shows results of a specific analyte in a specific sample.

A more condensed report is the "Current Report" which summarises the performance of all analytes in a specific sample.

The Annual Report summarizes all results giving an indication of overall performance for all analytes in all 8 samples.

Depending on the responsibilities within the laboratory participants can choose to inspect the annual report (QC managers) or all (or part of) detailed reports (scientific staff).

## **4. Discussion of Results in the Annual Report 2011**

In this part the results as seen in the annual report 2011 will be discussed. Please print out your annual report from the website when you follow the various aspects below and keep in mind that we only discuss the results of "all labs". It is up to you to inspect and interpret the results of your own laboratory.

### **4.1 Accuracy**

A first approach to evaluating your performance in terms of accuracy is comparison of your mean values in the eight samples with those of all labs. This is shown in the columns "your lab" and "all labs" under the heading "Accuracy". For example for protein the mean of all labs is 1.36 mg/vial, with which you can compare the mean of your lab.

### **4.2 Recovery**

A second approach to describe accuracy is the percentage recovery of added analyte. In this approach the amounts of weighed quantities added to the samples are the assumed target values after adjustment for blank values. The correlation between weighed amounts (on the x-axis) and your measured quantities (on the y-axis) has been calculated. The slope of the resulting relationship ( $a$  in  $y = ax + b$ ) in this formula multiplied by 100% is your recovery of the added amounts. The outcome for your lab in comparison to the median outcome of all labs is shown in the column "Recovery".

It can be seen that the mean recovery of cystine is 95% and of protein is 92%, which is excellent and very reassuring. We are all measuring the same thing.

#### **4.3 Precision**

Reproducibility is an important parameter for the analytical performance of a laboratory and is addressed in the schemes' design. Samples provided in pairs can be regarded as duplicates from which CV's can be calculated. The column "Precision" in the annual report shows your CV's in comparison to median values for all labs. The best median CV is observed for protein (4.4%). 10.5% and 14.1% are seen for cystine and cystine (nmol  $\frac{1}{2}$  cys/mg protein), respectively.

#### **4.4 Linearity**

Linearity over the whole relevant analytical range is another important parameter for analytical quality and is also examined within the schemes. A comparison of the weighed quantities on the x-axis and your measured quantities on the y-axis allows calculation of the coefficient of regression (**r**). The column "Linearity" in the annual report shows your **r** values in comparison to the median **r** values for all labs. Ideally the **r** value is close to 1.000 and this is indeed observed with values of 0.983 for protein and 0.994 for cystine.

#### **4.5 Interlab CV**

For comparison for diagnosis and monitoring of treatment for one patient in different hospitals and for use of shared reference values it is essential to have a high degree of harmonization between results of laboratories. Part of the schemes' design is to monitor this by calculating the Interlaboratory CV. This, along with the number of laboratories who submitted results is shown in the column "Data all labs" in the annual report. We see an interlab CV of 11.4% for protein and of 25.7% for cystine (nmol  $\frac{1}{2}$  cys/mg protein).

#### **4.6 Number of participating labs and submitting results**

37 labs received specimens, of which 9 did not submit results and 1 did not submit sufficient results to allow calculation of the annual report.

#### **4.7 Interrelationships between results**

Cystine (nmol  $\frac{1}{2}$  cys/mg protein) is a ratio of the assays of cystine (nmol/aliquot) and protein. The precision will be the cumulated precision of both assays.

#### **4.8 Report in correct numbers**

As we have indicated in previous reports it is important to report in the correct units. Although we feel that nearly all labs do that now, some strange results of individual labs might be traced back to "clerical errors". So if you have a deviating result, please check if you reported your result in the correct units.

#### **4.9 Your performance: red and green flags**

After some years of discussion and planning a system to judge performance of individual laboratories is implemented starting from January 2009. In the annual report of an individual laboratory red flags indicate poor performance for accuracy, precision, linearity and recovery. Amino acids with satisfactory performance for at least three of the four parameters (thus no or only one red flag or no result) receive a green flag. Thus a green flag indicates satisfactory performance for analysis of that particular amino acid while a red flag indicates that your laboratory has failed to attain satisfactory performance. Criteria for red flags can be found in the general information on the website (general information; interactive website, explanation annual report).

#### 4.10 **Poor Performance Policy**

A wide dispersion in the overall performance of individual laboratories is evident. Table 2 shows the percentage of red flags observed. 51% of the laboratories have no red flag at all and thus have attained excellent overall performance. In contrast, at the other extreme there are also 4% of laboratories with more than 25% red flags. Following intensive discussion within the ERNDIM board and Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) and taking into account feedback from participants we have been able to agree on a harmonised scoring system for the various branches of the Diagnostic Proficiency schemes and qualitative schemes. We have also tested a scoring system for the quantitative schemes as described in our Newsletter of Spring 2009. In parallel to this the SAB has agreed levels of adequate performance for all the schemes and these will be re-evaluated annually. The scoring systems have been carefully evaluated by members of the SAB and have been applied to assess performance in our schemes from 2007 onwards. The ERNDIM Board has decided that the Scientific Advisor will judge the performance of the individual laboratories based on these levels of satisfactory performance and issue a letter of advice of failure to achieve satisfactory performance to those laboratories which do not achieve satisfactory performance. The letter is intended to instigate dialogue between the EQA scheme organiser and the participating laboratory in order to solve any particular analytical problems in order to improve quality of performance of labs in the pursuit of our overall aim to improve quality of diagnostic services in this field.

*Table 2. Percentage Red Flags*

<b>% Red Flags seen in Annual Report</b>	<b>Percentage Labs In this Category</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage Of Labs</b>
>25%	4%	4%
20 – 25%	11%	15%
15 – 20%	19%	34%
10 – 15%	0%	34%
5 – 10%	15%	49%
0 – 5%	0%	49%
0%	51%	100%

#### 4.10 **Certificates**

As for other schemes the performance as it is indicated by the red/green flags in the individual laboratories annual report is summarised in the new style of annual participation certificate. The certificate lists the total number of amino acids in the scheme, the number for which results have been submitted and the number for which satisfactory performance has been achieved. It is important to bear in mind that the certificate has to be backed up by the individual annual report in the case of internal or external auditing.

#### 5. **Summary**

We feel that the scheme is well-established now. The mean performance of the labs, especially the recovery of added cystine and protein, is fine. Of course the performance of some individual labs require improvement. The Interlab CV demonstrates lack of standardisation which requires improvement. We would like to emphasise the need for all laboratories to use internal quality control. At its simplest this can be made from pooling surplus supernatants from assayed samples. We think that some of the aberrant results are still caused by simple calculating errors.

**6. *Preview of the Scheme in 2012***

The design of the 2012-scheme is the same as in 2011.

**7. *Questions, Comments and Suggestions***

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions please address to the scientific advisor of the Scheme, Dr. Mick Henderson ([mick.henderson@leedsth.nhs.uk](mailto:mick.henderson@leedsth.nhs.uk)) and/or the scheme organiser Dr. Cas Weykamp ([c.w.weykamp@skbwinterswijk.nl](mailto:c.w.weykamp@skbwinterswijk.nl)).

## **Warning Note**

### ***Concerning the Measurement of Protein***

A recent letter by Kathy Powell and Craig Langman in the January online edition of *Pediatr Nephrol* ref: DOI 10.1007/s00467-011-2095-3 highlights a significant problem. It came to light during a multi centre research trial that the results of protein analyses on white cell supernatants are consistently different by a factor of 0.65 when comparing the BCA to Lowry analytical methods. This difference does not appear when comparing the results of analyses using bovine serum albumin standards or quality control materials. The ERNDIM protein samples are based on bovine serum albumin. We have reviewed the data for the year 2010 and there are no significant method specific differences.

We feel it important to warn participants that different protein assays may give significantly different results with clinical samples. And to caution that consistency with ERNDIM EQA could give a false sense of reassurance that results are comparable between centres.