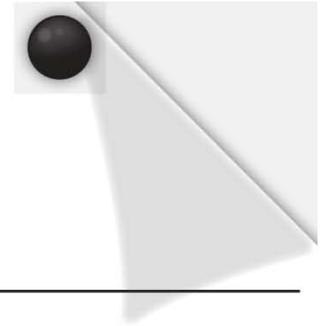


Tip of the Month



Warning: Coffee is Hot

Life is full of little surprises: tourniquets come undone, veins roll, things fall to the floor, and tubes push back. And let's not forget the biggest little surprise of all: coffee is hot. Some people play the victim and place blame on the nearest plausible target; others take personal responsibility and assess how they might have contributed to the problem.

For example, you insert the needle into a nice big vein and the patient barely winces. You release the skin you were pulling taut to anchor the vein and gently push the first of several tubes into the tube holder. Your thumb is on the bottom of the tube and your first two fingers straddle the flared wings of the tube holder. When you gently squeeze the two together, the needle pierces the stopper and blood begins to fill the tube. Even though you've done this a thousand times, that first splash of blood into the tube is still a beautiful thing. It validates you. It tells you you haven't lost your touch. Feeling ever so confident, you relax your thumb and let the tube fill. But as soon as you release it, the tube pushes off of the needle and everything stops.

You have two options: you can either become frustrated and lodge a formal complaint with the tube manufacturer, or you can push the tube back on and hold it until it's filled. It's not a big deal. But, like everything else that won't go your way today, you can always pin the blame on someone else if you really need to.

We all have a choice how to handle the most common aggravations that can occur during specimen collection. What choice sounds the most reasonable to you?

- If the tourniquet comes undone unexpectedly, do you complain to the company that makes the tourniquet or start tying them a little more securely?
- When your gauze falls to the floor, do you complain to the Creator of gravity or do you hold things a little more firmly?
- If a vein rolls, do you blame the patient for having rolling veins or do you start anchoring veins better?
- If the tube pushes back, do you blame the tube manufacturer or do you simply hold the tubes in place until they're full?

Pushback is a common occurrence with a simple solution. In the grand scheme of things, it's one of the easiest to remedy. As the tube fills, simply maintain its position. Problem solved. What else were you going to do with your free hand anyway?

When specimen collection doesn't go as planned, we can blame tourniquets, gravity, veins, and tubes our whole life or we can consider how we might have contributed to the problem and adapt. It may be easier to play the blame game, but those who take personal responsibility and adapt tend to live longer, be happier and are generally easier to be around.

There are plenty of other frustrations worthy of our angst besides tubes that push off, veins that roll, tourniquets that come undone and things that fall to the floor. Hold off on placing blame for those things in life that are really out of your control... like not being told the coffee you purchased was hot.