

Tip of the Month



The Path of Least Resistance

The path of least resistance sometimes seems like an inviting course to take. That's because a "go-with-the-flow" attitude can sidestep confrontations and minimize hassles in the workplace. On the surface, it appears to be a smart and effortless way to stay out of hot water. But here's an interesting fact about the path of least resistance; you don't find healthcare heroes meandering along it. Instead, they always follow their guiding principles.

Patient identification—When it comes to incorrect information on a patient's armband or test order, the path of least resistance reasons this must be the right Mrs. Smith simply because she's in the right place at the right time. But those who consistently practice proper patient identification don't fall into a rut of assumptions. Instead, they resolve all discrepancies before proceeding with the draw.

Equipment selection—When a patient with prominent, palpable veins insists on a butterfly needle, the path of least resistance doesn't make waves. It allows the patient to dictate the equipment used without considering the ripple effects, including the increased risk of accidental needlestick associated with butterflies and the supplies cost to the facility. In contrast, protectors of safety tactfully educate patients regarding their rationale for needle selection and reserve butterflies for more challenging draws.

Sample labeling—If presented with unlabeled tubes drawn by others, the path of least resistance says not to rock the boat; just accept and label them. It places value on the short-term convenience of not re-sticking the patient instead of taking into account the catastrophic consequences that can result from sample misidentification. Healthcare heroes know that one of their responsibilities is patient advocacy. Rather than go with the flow, they fight against the current of complacency by rejecting samples that can lead to erroneous results and patient mismanagement.

After the draw—Specimen quality can be compromised if samples collected are not transported and processed in a timely and appropriate manner. When delays occur and samples are subjected to negative external forces over time, analyte stability erodes. Such samples create a quagmire of inaccurate results and inappropriate clinical decisions, marring the landscape of patient care.

So, what path are you taking? Instead of avoiding friction at all costs, dare to tread on high ground. Healthcare heroes who hold fast to the standards blaze a trail of best practices for others to follow. Heeding their sign posts will keep you safely between the ditches and provide your patients with the quality lab services they expect and deserve.