

THE MML DIFFERENCE: SURGICAL PATHOLOGY CONSULTATION #5439

BACKGROUND

While most tissue specimens are evaluated by local pathologists, a small percentage are sent to external pathologists for a second opinion and/or additional studies.¹ The rate of outside referrals depends, in part, upon the nature of the local medical practice and the expertise of the local pathology group.

Mayo Medical Laboratories' Surgical Pathology Consultation #5439 is performed by Mayo Clinic pathologists, who are acknowledged to be among the best in the world. The patient mix and surgical case-loads at Mayo Clinic provide exposure to, and experience with, an unprecedented diversity of disease processes. The breadth of experience encompasses all aspects of surgical pathology and is augmented by a wide array of ancillary studies. Mayo surgical pathologists apply this knowledge to patients' cases and provide timely verbal and written consultations, usually with a turnaround time of 2 days or less.

PATIENT CARE INFORMATION

When Is A Second Opinion Needed?

Second opinions are often sought when a definite diagnosis is not possible locally. Initial diagnoses may be uncertain because of the nature of the disease process, because the specimen is insufficient, or because the pathologist is not familiar with the disease. In other situations, on-site ancillary test options may not be available to the local pathologist. Clinicians and patients also generate requests for second opinions.

Benefits of the Test

- ◆ Patients' emotional well-being is enhanced by diagnostic confirmation.
- ◆ Institutions retain patients and have more efficient resource allocation for pathology staffing and patient treatment.
- ◆ Improved diagnostic certainty and accuracy. While diagnoses are infrequently changed (up to 6.2% of the cases in 3 reports),¹⁻³ when changes do occur, they are almost always associated with changes in treatment plans (93%) and patients' prognoses (94%), thus optimizing treatment.³
- ◆ Unnecessary surgeries are reduced up to 19%.²

HEALTH CARE ECONOMICS

While second-opinion consultations may appear to be expensive, when surgery or additional procedures are avoided, the cost of the consultation is quite economical. Studies have reported direct cost savings ranging from \$1 to \$22 for each dollar spent on a second opinion.³

- ◆ Direct cost savings from avoiding unnecessary surgeries.
- ◆ Indirect cost savings resulting from reduced morbidity or potential litigation.

REFERENCES

1. Azam NR M: Surgical Pathology Extradepartmental Consultation Practices: A CAP Q-Probes Study of 2746 Consultations From 180 Laboratories. Arch Pathol Lab Med 2002;126:405-412
2. Kronz WW JD, Epstein JI: Mandatory Second Opinion Surgical Pathology at a Large Referral Hospital. Cancer 1999;86:2426-2435
3. Epstein PW JI, Sanfilippo FM: Clinical and Cost Impact of Second-opinion Pathology. The Am J of Surg Path 1996;20:851-857