



Patient safety and quality strategy

2024–2029

Introduction

Our patient safety and quality strategy demonstrates the College's commitment to high standards of care and patient welfare. This strategy allows us to begin addressing unique safety concerns and challenges affecting pathology, and to proactively identify potential risks and vulnerabilities, to minimise errors.

This strategy promotes a strong safety culture, encouraging active engagement from members and professionals in promoting pathology staff and patient welfare. It aligns the College with national and international safety standards, reinforcing patient confidence and trust in our profession. With a robust patient safety and quality strategy in place, we will continue to be well-equipped to support pathologists in delivering the highest quality of patient care and maintain the public's confidence in the field of pathology.

Our vision

The vision for the patient safety and quality strategy aligns with our overarching vision of 'developing and supporting excellence in pathology for healthcare across the world' as well as our mission to 'advance the science and practice of pathology'.

The strategy embodies our commitment to leadership, innovation and continuous improvement in response to evolving healthcare challenges, ensuring our strategy is both relevant and forward-thinking. The following vision statement outlines the strategy's overarching aim:

'Empowering the pathology workforce to provide high-quality, safe pathology services through innovation, collaboration and excellence'.



Our strategic aims

Quality improvement and patient safety

Advance patient safety and service quality in pathology through data-driven initiatives, quality improvement training for staff, enhanced error reporting and comprehensive guidelines.

Workforce expansion, development and wellbeing

Cultivate a robust and resilient pathology workforce by enhancing diagnostic service quality, promoting wellbeing, and ensuring adequate staffing levels and professional development opportunities.

Digital transformation and technological integration

Seek to ensure that technology, such as automation, digital pathology and AI, is embraced within pathology services ensuring patient safety benefits are maximised.

Regulatory compliance, accreditation and advocacy

Proactively engage with regulatory and accreditation bodies to influence regulatory frameworks and support pathologists in navigating these, ensuring compliance and enhancing patient safety.

Collaboration

Foster interdisciplinary collaboration and effective communication with healthcare providers, industry partners and research organisations to enhance pathology services integration and patient care.

Communication

Effectively communicate with all stakeholders.



Our strategy is to drive high-quality, safe and sustainable pathology services. This involves the design and creation of systems that enable and support pathologists to deliver excellence in our contribution to patient journeys. The strategy is based around human factors principles to ensure the design of safe and supported working environments in laboratory buildings, appropriate equipment, effective layout and adequate resources. We will be led by 6 strategic aims. The aims are interrelated, providing a framework for implementation, and they will enable us to work towards our vision.

Strategic aim 1: Quality improvement and patient safety

Advance patient safety and service quality in pathology through data-driven initiatives, enhanced error reporting and comprehensive guidelines.

The College will:

1. collect and analyse NHS England data, and where feasible, data from NHS Wales, NHS Scotland, and Health and Social Care Northern Ireland, identifying key areas of risk/errors across pathology disciplines to support the development of relevant patient safety workstreams and resources
2. enhance the reporting of external quality assurance (EQA) outcomes to highlight areas of excellence across testing disciplines and share best practice
3. more closely align EQA schemes with College governance to ensure consistency and compliance in quality standards
4. build on existing clinical guidelines, develop and disseminate guidelines to standardise practices across all areas of pathology, incorporating human factors to significantly enhance safety and efficacy in laboratory environments
5. establish a patient safety oversight group for safety initiatives and to ensure continuous improvement.



Strategic aim 2: Workforce expansion, development and wellbeing

Cultivate a robust and resilient pathology workforce by enhancing diagnostic service quality, promoting wellbeing, and ensuring adequate staffing levels and professional development opportunities, including enhanced medical management provision and power to enact these strategies.

The College will:

1. publish and promote guidelines for minimum safe staffing levels in pathology specialties
2. work with employers in both the NHS and private/industry sectors to highlight workforce wellbeing factors impacting patient safety
3. implement a programme of work to support the professional and personal wellbeing of pathologists and scientists, including delivering a suite of resources to support this in the workplace
4. work with stakeholders to develop options for an expanded pathology workforce and explore the use of non-medical staff to better support pathologists
5. work with relevant partners to develop resources that will support pathologists and scientists in keeping up to date with the latest advances in laboratory technologies across pathology specialties, to ensure and enhance diagnostic accuracy, improve patient outcomes and maintain high standards of care.

Strategic aim 3: Digital transformation and technological integration

Seek to ensure that technology, such as automation, digital pathology and AI, is embraced within pathology services ensuring patient safety benefits are maximised.

The College will:

1. advocate for and support the integration of advanced digital tools and AI in pathology to enhance diagnostic accuracy and efficiency



2. identify and promote laboratory equipment and IT solutions that can streamline workflows, improving patient safety
3. collaborate with laboratory equipment and IT providers, for example Laboratory Information Management Systems (LIMS), to develop a comprehensive set of best practice resources
4. develop guidelines for optimising testing practices that outline best practice for the use of automation, IT and digital tools in diagnostic testing.

Strategic aim 4: Regulatory compliance, accreditation and advocacy

Proactively engage with regulatory and accreditation bodies to influence regulatory frameworks and support pathologists in navigating these, ensuring compliance and enhancing patient safety in pathology services.

The College will:

1. establish and maintain ongoing dialogues with stakeholders, including regulatory bodies and policymakers, to advocate for streamlined regulatory processes that are both efficient and supportive of advancements in pathology practices
2. develop strategies and support the development of resources to assist pathology laboratories in understanding and meeting standards
3. establish a forum where all pathology professionals can share experiences, best practices, challenges and solutions related to regulatory compliance.

Strategic aim 5: Collaboration

Foster interdisciplinary collaboration and effective communication with healthcare providers, industry partners and research organisations to enhance pathology services integration and patient care.

The College will:

1. promote collaborative initiatives to facilitate the adoption of best practices in point-of-care testing (POCT) and personalised medicine within pathology practice



2. advocate for improved digital communication and integrated systems across pathology providers including within the private sector and the NHS
3. collaborate and establish relationships across healthcare organisations and related industries to facilitate the adoption of best practice and advance patient safety and quality of care.

Strategic aim 6: Communication

Effectively communicate with all stakeholders.

The College will:

1. develop a communications plan to ensure all stakeholders are kept up to date with our work
2. develop and deliver educational resources to showcase patient safety in pathology and enhance stakeholders' understanding and appreciation of the pathologists' role
3. advocate for the interests of pathology at various levels of government and within the healthcare sector, industry partners and research organisations.



The Royal College of Pathologists is a professional membership organisation with more than 11,000 fellows, affiliates and trainees worldwide. We are committed to setting and maintaining professional standards and promoting excellence in the teaching and practice of pathology, for the benefit of patients.

Our members include medically and veterinary qualified pathologists and clinical scientists in 17 different specialties, including cellular pathology, haematology, clinical biochemistry, medical microbiology and veterinary pathology.

The College works with pathologists at every stage of their career. We set curricula, organise training and run exams, publish clinical guidelines and best practice recommendations and provide continuing professional development. We engage a wide range of stakeholders to improve awareness and understanding of pathology and the vital role it plays in everybody's healthcare. Working with members, we run programmes to inspire the next generation to study science and join the profession.

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