

National Department of Health

Situation in Forensic Chemistry Laboratories

Presentation to the Portfolio
Committee on Health
01 September 2010

1

Functions of the FCLs - in brief

- Toxicology - involves the analyses of exhibit material (biological and others) for the presence of harmful substances. This information is utilised by the pathologist when determining the cause of death. The service is provided to the SAPS and the NPP.
- Blood Alcohol analysis - involves the analyses of ante-mortem and post-mortem blood for the presence of alcohol (ethanol)
- Food analysis - involves the chemical analysis of foodstuffs in order to monitor compliance with legislation and ensure food safety.

2

Relevant Legislation

- The work performed is a statutory obligation. Relevant legislation includes:
 - Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1977,
 - Inquest Act 58 of 1959,
 - Drugs and Drug trafficking Act 140 of 1992,
 - Medicines and Related Substances Act 101 of 1965,
 - Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act 54 of 1972,
 - Fertilizer, Farm Feeds, Agricultural Remedies and Stock Remedies Act 36 of 1947,
 - Liquor Products Act 60 of 1989
 - Road Traffic Act.

3

Staff establishment and vacancies

Post establishment	Cape Town	Jhb	Pretoria
Head of lab	1	1(1)	1
Section heads	4(1)	4(1)	4(1)
Analysts	15(1)	19(1)	13(4)
Lab assistants	8(5)	2	3(2)
Admin	4	4(1)	4(1)
Cleaning/other	4	5	4
Total	36(7)	35(4)	29(8)

- In addition a work-study assessment conducted by the Department recommended that an extra 12 posts be created in each of the Cape Town and Pretoria Laboratories. (Jhb must still be assessed but this is not possible until all renovations are complete and work resumes in earnest).

5

Current Funding

	Compen sation	Goods and Services	Capital	Total
Jhb	6 884	3 711	4 672	15 267
Pretoria	5 205	3 793	3 505	12 503
Cape Town	7 349	3 736	3 505	14 590
Total				44 693 ⁶

- The length of time it takes to conduct a toxicology analysis is variable. A case can be completed within 1 week, but more often the analyst has to go through a whole range of possible alternatives before the correct one is found. A “reasonable” time frame once it is with an analyst is 2 months - but this could be longer, depending on circumstances.

7

Some actions taken to deal with the problems

- The Department delegated responsibility for procurement of goods and services up to R150 000 to the laboratory heads as a way to fast track provision of chemicals, repairs to equipment etc.
- Critical Posts were advertised and a short-listing has been done. (Earmarked funds will be used to fund these posts).
- A number of staff have undergone training to keep up with latest scientific developments, running of laboratory information management systems etc.

8

Cont.

- Investigated contracting out work but this is too expensive and difficult to maintain chains of custody.
- Permitted overtime where funds permitted.
- Began negotiations with the NPA and SAPS to establish whether all samples still required analysis.

9

- **The key issue to resolving the problems is funding.**

- While some efficiency gains can be made through for example less rigorous procurement practices and more motivated staff, unless posts are filled and mechanisms put in place to for example:-

- retain staff;
- adequate supplies are made available when needed;
- machines can be fixed when they break down etc,

it will be impossible to get the turn around needed and it will not be possible to dent the backlogs.

- Sometimes changes such as improving staff morale can be done without funding but in this case even this is difficult given the conditions and stress that people are working under – and have been for a long time.

10

- Sometimes changes such as improving staff morale can be done without funding but in this case even this is difficult given the conditions and stress that people are working under – and have been for a long time.

11

Attempts to get funding

- The Department requested funding from Treasury for the current financial year and though some money was given (R2 million) this is not adequate to meet the challenges faced.
- The department has again put in a new bid to Treasury to adequately fund the FCLs.
- If granted this funding will be used to recruit and retain staff; ensure that goods and services that are required are available when needed; buying of new equipment.

12

Additional

- Where management support is required this will be provided.
- Staff will also work overtime to deal with backlogs .
- There will however still be some problems with premises and this needs to also be addressed.

13

Thank-you! We are
still hopeful!

14