

Tip of the Month



Trick or Treat

Blood specimen collection can be tricky. Perform it incorrectly and you can trick physicians into mismanaging their patients when they base medical decisions on inaccurate test results. Here's how:

Trick: *Not properly identifying the patient.* Failing to draw the right sample on the right patient creates a string of bad luck that can have disastrous consequences for everyone involved. Instead, treat patients as if they were a member of your own family by taking the time to properly verify their name and information, comparing it to the test order. You'd do it for your *Mummy*.

Trick: *Not drawing timed specimens on time.* Physicians can be *haunted* by test results that are time-dependent, but are not drawn according to proper dosing or requested timed intervals. You can remove the *spirit* of confusion in such situations by always adhering to the collection schedule for timed draws.

Trick: *Not assuring the patient has met test requirements (i.e., fasting) prior to the draw.* Samples obtained from patients who do not meet test specifications can produce results that mislead physicians by masking the patient's true medical status. To avoid this *scary* scenario, ensure every patient is properly instructed and prepared before you collect.

Trick: *Inducing hemoconcentration through prolonged tourniquet application.* When a tourniquet is left in place beyond one minute, hemoconcentration occurs creating a mixed bag of analytes very different from the patient's actual physiology. If locating a vein is difficult and requires the tourniquet to remain in place for longer than a minute, make a mental note of the vein's location and then loosen the tourniquet for a *spell* to allow the hemoconcentration to *magically* disperse. Then reapply and perform the draw.

Trick: *Improperly cleansing the site prior to the draw (i.e., blood cultures and blood alcohol).* When proper site preparation falls by the wayside, you open the door for the *Boogiemani*. He can appear in the form of contaminated blood cultures that mislead the physician or the lawyer who can have a legal blood alcohol result tossed out of court.

Trick: *Failure to follow the order of draw.* Additive carryover can create invisible errors with *ghastly* outcomes when additive tubes are drawn out of the prescribed sequence. To spare your patients and not *spook* your doctors, stick to CLSI's recommended order of draw for both venipunctures and capillary collections.

Trick: *Not properly labeling the sample at the patient's side.* Being in a hurry or working with a *skeleton* crew is no excuse for not taking the time to label the samples you collect at the time of collection. Where feasible, it's a good idea to have the patient verify the information on the labeled tube is theirs.

Trick: *Delayed transport of samples collected.* Irrevocable changes occur when samples are not transported and processed in a timely manner. Such compromised samples should be rejected and disposed of by the laboratory, where they can *rest in peace*.

Treat all your patients to the proper protocol when drawing and handling their blood samples. Hospitals and other health-care facilities can be a scary place. The trick to putting patients at ease is to make sure your procedure isn't *masquerading* as something it isn't.