

## GIRFT Pathology Project and the Pathology Consolidation Programme

The pathology workstream of the Getting it Right First Time (GIRFT) programme and the Pathology Consolidation Programme are parallel projects within NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE/I). Both programmes are based in the Improvement Directorate with the aim to improve services and best practice in the NHS. Each programme has a different focus in respect of their relationship with pathology networks and laboratories at NHS trusts.

The GIRFT pathology workstream is following the established GIRFT methodology. The value of GIRFT has been clearly laid out in the NHS Long Term Plan: *“Our approach is to deliver clinically-led improvement and put the patient in the heart of the system. We deliver this through an approach called Getting It Right First Time (GIRFT)”*. The GIRFT pathology team is looking at things from a clinical improvement perspective.

The Pathology Consolidation Programme was initiated following Lord Carter of Coles’ 2016 report into unwarranted variation and has continued as a key commitment in the Long Term Plan, seeking to remove this unwarranted variation among pathology services through the establishment of pathology networks. The programme is working with trusts and providers to form 29 regional pathology networks; and are also working with providers of specialist diagnostic pathology services on a national basis, supporting these services to network at a scale that supports the sustainability and effectiveness of such highly complex services. Consolidating pathology services enables more consistent, clinically appropriate turnaround times, ensuring the right test is available at the right time. It makes better use of our highly skilled workforce to deliver improved, earlier diagnostic services, supporting better patient outcomes.

The two programmes will overlap or appear to duplicate because they will look at the same services and may use the same data. The difference between the programmes is in approach. We might ask the same questions, we may ask them in a slightly different ways and may view the answers in different ways. However, this information is shared between both teams, looking for examples where we can drive improvements across the sector, delivering better care for our patients.

The GIRFT pathology approach is through a clinical conversation with key players within pathology networks and departments, including a ‘deep dive’ discussion with individual NHS trust pathology teams. The starting point for these discussions is relevant data and metrics gathered during the analytical stage of the workstream, focusing on areas of variation. These are likely to identify both good and apparently sub-optimal practice; in both cases further local investigation to understand possible causes, learn from these, disseminate best practice and focus on areas for improvement, is the purpose of the ‘deep dive’ visits to trusts. Regional leads from the Pathology Consolidation Programme are welcome to attend and will be invited to the GIRFT ‘deep dive’ meetings as observers.

The Pathology Consolidation Programme is working with hospital trusts and networks to deliver a national strategy. Engagement is at the trust executive level to ensure system leaders responsible for change are held to account. Data collection, based upon overarching metrics, is used to populate the Model Hospital benchmarking IT platform, to identify areas of focus locally and nationally and to monitor change as services transform. This data is also used to support the CQC use of resources inspections.

The GIRFT pathology workstream clinical leads have a seat at the National Pathology Optimisation and Delivery Group (NPODG) meetings, enabling regular updates and sharing of progress between the two workstreams. It is recognised that the developing pathology networks are at different stages of their journey and the GIRFT project team is sensitive to this.

Once several of the clinical conversations (GIRFT deep dive visits) have taken place, the GIRFT pathology clinical leads will gather emerging themes to include within their national specialty report for pathology. It is following publication of this report that more convergence between the programmes is anticipated. For example, the GIRFT pathology report is likely to make recommendations for system improvement. GIRFT and the Pathology Consolidation Programme (and other stakeholders) will seek to work together to implement this system change.

For further information about the GIRFT pathology workstream, please contact the workstream’s project manager Olu Akinremi [o.akinremi1@nhs.net](mailto:o.akinremi1@nhs.net). If you would like more information about the Pathology Consolidation Programme, please contact [nhsi.pathservices@nhs.net](mailto:nhsi.pathservices@nhs.net)