

To comment or not to comment?

A review of Duty Biochemist commenting practices for primary care

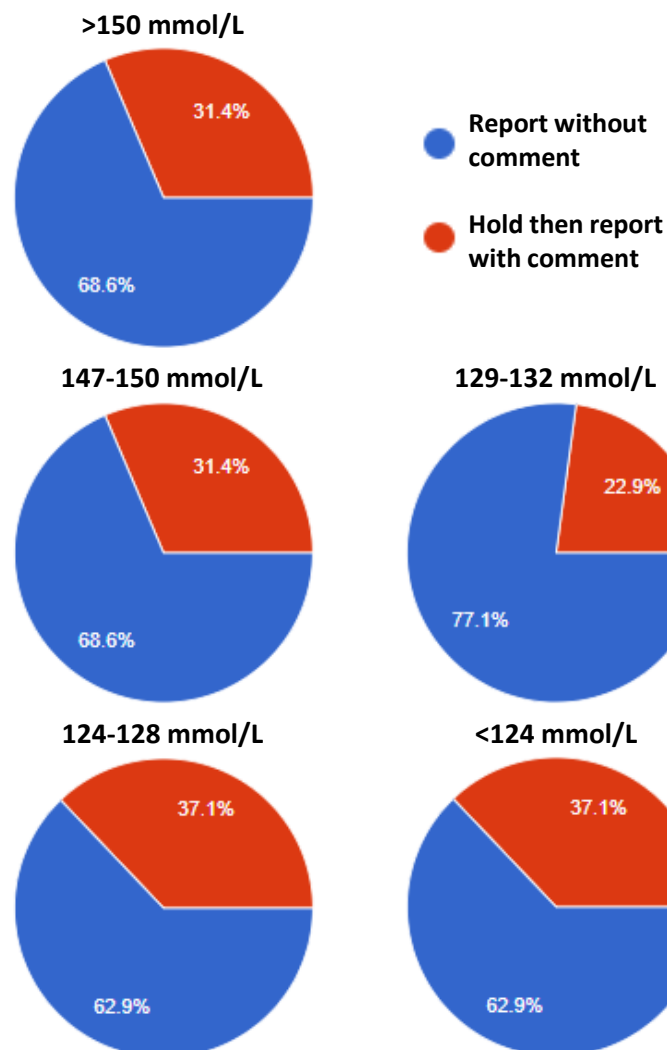
K. Hedgethorne, Derriford Combined Laboratory, Derriford Hospital, Plymouth, PL6 8DH

A core responsibility of the Duty Biochemist is the addition of interpretive comments to abnormal results to aid diagnosis, management or to guide further investigation. At Derriford Combined Laboratory we are currently reviewing our commenting practices to ensure that the service we provide to primary care is meeting the needs of our users and is adding clinical value.

As a first step we put together a survey for local GPs to find a consensus on how our primary care requestors would like us to process certain abnormal results. Currently all electrolyte and calcium results for primary care are reported immediately following their technical validation in the laboratory (with the exception of any results that breach the phoning limits; these are communicated either directly to the surgery, or to the out of hours service). In order for interpretive comments to be added by a Clinical Scientist, these results will need to be held for review during routine working hours, delaying the reporting of some results. With this in mind, it was important to establish whether GPs would like us to prioritise the quick release of abnormal results or the addition of comments to aid interpretation.

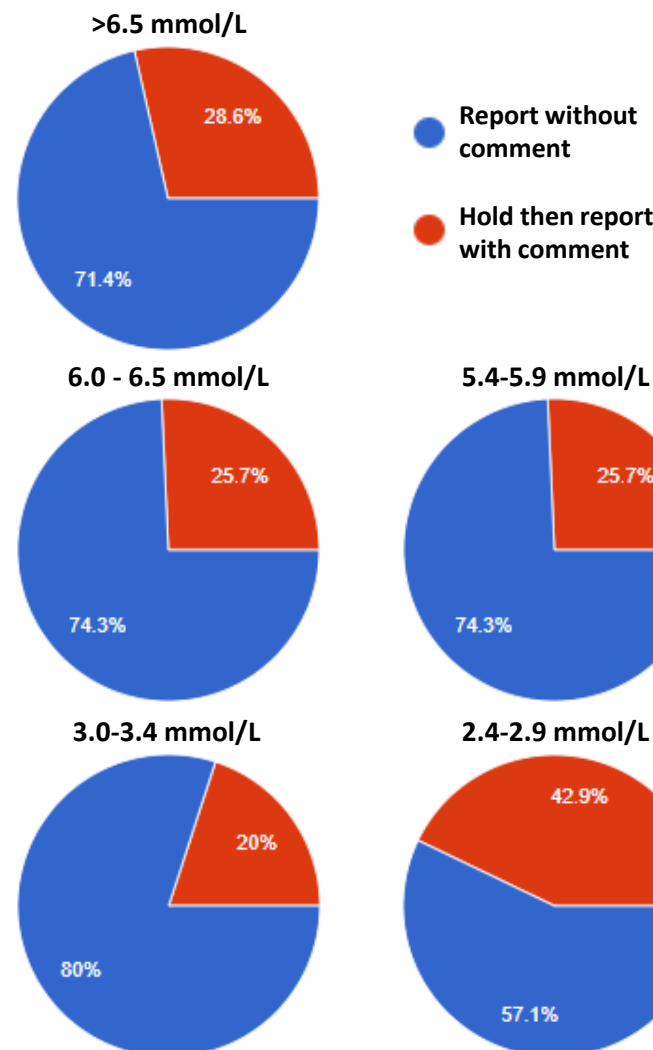
The survey was distributed to local GP practices as both a Google Form and a Word document to be returned via email. The overwhelming majority of respondents had a preference for the online form, with only 2/35 choosing to return their feedback via e-mail. Overall we had good participation for the survey, with 35 responses from 31 surgeries; **70%** of surgeries contacted took part.

Q1. What is your preferred action for the following abnormal SODIUM results:



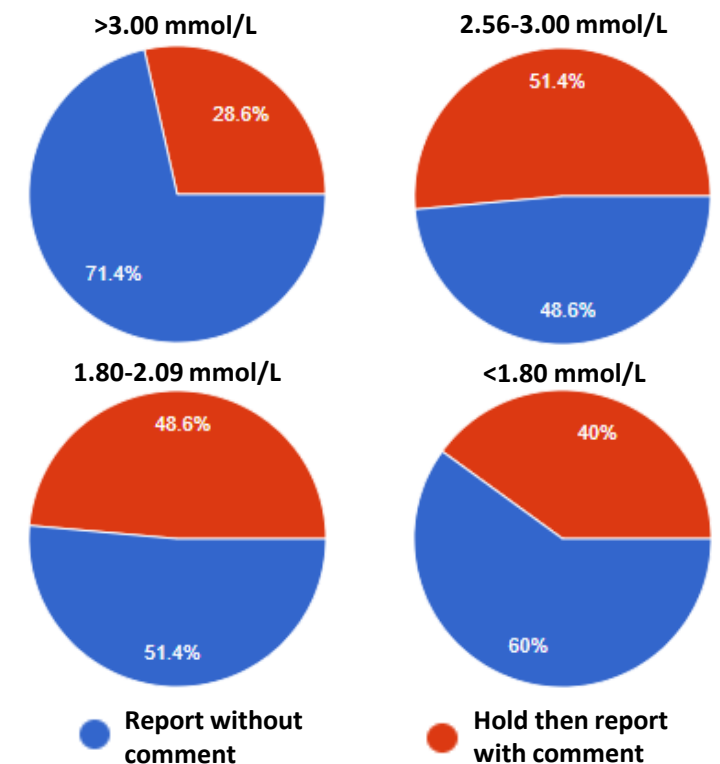
Conclusion 1: Sodium results outside of the reference interval will be released immediately without the addition of interpretive comments.

Q2. What is your preferred action for the following abnormal POTASSIUM results:



Conclusion 2: All potassium results outside of the reference interval will be released immediately without the addition of interpretive comments.

Q3. What is your preferred action for the following abnormal CALCIUM results:



Conclusion 3: Calcium results outside of the phoning limits will be released immediately. Those within the phoning limits but outside of the reference interval will be held in the DB queue for interpretation.

Conclusion: GPs often value prompt reporting of abnormal results over the addition of interpretive comments, but this depends on the test in question and the extent of the abnormality. Online surveys are an effective way to gauge the opinion of service users to ensure that Duty Biochemist commenting practices meet the needs of the end-user.