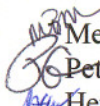
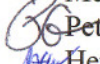
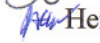




UNC  
HEALTH CARE

**MEMORANDUM #130**

TO: UNC Hospitals Attending Physicians, Housestaff, Nursing Coordinators, Department Heads and Supervisors

FROM:  Melissa B. Miller, PhD, Director, Mycobacteriology Laboratory  
 Peter H. Gilligan, PhD, Director, Microbiology-Immunology Laboratory  
 Herbert C. Whinna, MD, PhD, Interim Director, McLendon Clinical Laboratories

DATE: October 28, 2009

**SUBJECT: Microbiology Specimen Rejection Policy Update: Swabs Unacceptable for Mycobacterial Culture**

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Effective November 2, 2009, the Clinical Microbiology-Immunology Laboratory **will begin rejecting swab specimens submitted for mycobacterial (AFB, acid fast bacillus) culture**. We will accept surgically-obtained swabs collected in the operating room ONLY if it is not possible to obtain biopsy or aspirate material for culture. The preferred specimens are tissue and/or aspirate material. Do NOT collect aspirate material with a swab but rather submit the fluid directly for culture. Tissue should be submitted in a sterile container with a small amount of sterile saline to prevent desiccation.

We have reviewed ten years worth of swab data and found that **swabs are very low yield specimens for mycobacterial culture**. Specifically, in ten years only two patients (0.3% of those with swabs submitted) had a positive swab and a corresponding negative aspirate from the same site. There were no examples of a positive swab with a negative corresponding biopsy from the same site. Further, of negative swabs cultured for mycobacteria, 7% had a corresponding positive biopsy or aspirate. Processing low yield specimens have a negative impact on our laboratory workflow and **leads to false negative results**.

This policy change does not affect deep pharyngeal swabs submitted from patients with cystic fibrosis.

Further information on AFB Miscellaneous Cultures can be found online at: [http://labs.unchealthcare.org/labstestinfo/cult\\_tests/afb\\_misc.htm](http://labs.unchealthcare.org/labstestinfo/cult_tests/afb_misc.htm) . Please remember to refer to the McLendon Clinical Laboratories website which will answer many of your ordering questions (<http://labs.unchealthcare.org/>). Questions not answered by the website can be directed to the Microbiology Laboratory at 966-4053, Dr. Melissa Miller at 966-3723, or Dr. Peter Gilligan at 966-6313.