

Utilisation of pathology procedures

To the Editor: The article on utilisation of pathology procedures in the South African private pathology sector, published in the SAMJ recently,¹ refers. Solutions are proposed that have no bearing on the 'factual' material presented, and aspersions are cast designed to advance the aspirations of Veripath, a commercial managed care enterprise. The conclusions have long been the credo of Veripath and are not based on the claims database surveyed. Veripath input is acknowledged, but the author should indicate that he is a full-time employee of the managed care company. [*Dr Pretorius declared his relationship with Veripath and the medical aid industry in a letter accompanying the original submission of his article.* – Editor]

Bias and vested interest flaws any useful examination of the material by the author or his cohorts. Although the information bears examination, any extrapolation is flawed because the baselines are neither decided nor constant. The SAMJ has been used as a platform to advance not scientific conclusions, but a thinly veiled sales pitch that is being touted to advance their credibility. The CPD questionnaire seems to indicate that the article has been accepted as the final word on the topic. It cannot be. There is no dearth of published articles on laboratory utilisation, but when new pathology tests seem to arrive almost every day, articles published up to 33 years ago might not be entirely relevant except to advance vested interests!

With the advent of ICD-10 much more scientific and locally relevant information related to clinical diagnosis, treatment and outcome will be available, and not postulates that the author questions, but advances as evidence to support the views of Veripath. The latter, like other managed care organisations, extracts its bit of the health care rand. Veripath does not have custodianship of the information, and is not credibly qualified to advance opinions on its clinical application.

It is time to cut out the middlemen, who are not needed by funders or pathologists, between whom a working relationship is possible, as with all professional groups. Pathologists, who it seems are deemed the villains of medicine, will welcome the constructive evaluation of laboratory medicine, which will be possible when ICD-10 data become available. Funders must share and use this information constructively rather than adopt an adversarial approach to problem solving. Pathology is a referral discipline and the referring doctor largely drives the mode of testing. Pathologists are an integral and indispensable part of the health care system, adding significant value to the health care outcome.

The reasons for medical analysis, including pathology, are investigative to ascertain abnormality, quantitative to quantify or stage disease, confirmatory or defensive to confirm disease, and to ensure that litigious liability has not been overlooked. It invites assumption of legal liability should prescription be imposed. Castigating pathologists for using their expertise