Calculating The Cost of Missing Specimens

Tolerating lost specimens is too expensive to ignore. Calculate the cost and find a solution to stop bleeding cash in your lab.

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Getting the Numbers

Alia Atwaru, MHA, from Northwell Health and the Hofstra North Shore–LIJ School of Medicine in Hempstead, New York conducted a study to get a better handle on just how much seemingly innocuous lab errors actually cost. Atwaru and her colleagues conducted a retrospective cost analysis associated with the most common errors at Northwell Health Laboratories, a large central core lab and 16 hospital labs that perfom more than 19 million billable tests each year.

Upon completion of the study, Atwaru was astonished to learn the substantial costs associated with missing or lost specimens. See Chart

Source: https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/868957

Chart 1

Average Costs Associated with Missing/Lost Specimens

Type of Error	Hours Spent	Cost per Error, $	3-Month Cost, $
Specimen missing and found	11.7	401.25	14,846.25
Specimen missing and never found	18.5	583.72	20,430.20

The Root Problem

In 2016, a trend of lost specimens was detected at the University of Minnesota Medical Center (UMMC) laboratories. Upon investigation, on average, the laboratory could not account for 6-7 specimens per week, or 25-30 specimens per month, which was deemed unacceptable for quality patient care and service. To determine the cause of each lost or missing specimen, in October 2016, a Lost Specimen Review Committee made up of front-line laboratory supervisors, leads, and staff was formed.

Qualitative data revealed that the common responses to a lost specimen were, "Just redraw the specimen," or "Ask the provider if they still need this result" In essence, the lab culture tolerated lost specimens.

The root cause analysis conducted by UMMC showed that at the time of investigation, transport or delivery problems were the most common source of missing specimens and other deviations.

Source: https://www.medlabmag.com/article/1591

Calculate Your Cost of Missing Specimens

Many outreach labs regularly lose specimens and consider it a normal by-product of their business. It's not that they want to lose specimens, but in the hectic day-to-day of business, it somehow just becomes acceptable. Sadly, apathy towards any problem typically breeds a culture of tolerance which, with time, inevitably turns into costly major issues.

When a specimen can't be replaced, and a customer's trust is irreversibly broken the damage of tolerance has already been made, often to the detriment of a patient and at the liability of the lab. If your lab or courier service is missing or losing specimens it is important to understand the associated annual costs and take steps towards prevention.

Fill In Your Average Number of Missing or Lost Specimen Per Week
(Based on Estimates from Chart 1)

Avg. # of specimens missing & found <u>per week</u>:   **Estimated Annual Cost, $:**
Avg. # of specimens missing and never found <u>per week</u>:   **Estimated Annual Cost, $:**

Total Estimated Annual Cost:

MCE: Schedule a Demo – Implement – Save

Barcode and electronic tracking technologies are proven superior solutions for recording the chain of custody of patient samples to prevent lost or missing specimens.

MCE was specifically designed for medical laboratories and hospital systems to electronically track the pickup of patient samples from the physician office to delivery at the lab. By utilizing barcoding technologies couriers are able to reconcile pick-up and deliveries of specimens. If a sample is missing the courier knows before they ever leave the lab and can address the problem immediatly.

Other Specimen Tracking Features:

- Record specimen type, location, courier info, and pick-up/delivery times.
- Capture customer signatures at pick-up
- Automatically send customer emails listing all samples picked-up.
- Missing specimen alerts at lab delivery.
- Bulk Specimen Scanning Capability
- Record Specimen Transfers between couriersor other reference labs.
- Reporting – Search or report specimen data for specific customers or as a whole.

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