

The UK Medical Culture Collections and Health Protection: an Integrated Service.

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The Health Protection Agency in the UK is a multi-disciplinary public body with a statutory remit to protect the UK population against threats from infectious disease, radiological and chemical hazards. Within this organisation the Health Protection Agency Culture Collections (HPACC) is a not-for-profit, strategic business unit funded by a combination of commercial income from sales and government grants.

The HPACC is a fully integrated business comprised of: the European Collection of Cell Cultures (ECACC); the National Collection of Type Cultures (pathogenic bacteria) (NCTC); the National Collection of Pathogenic Viruses (NCPV) and the National Collection of Pathogenic Fungi (NCPF). The HPACC mission is to support and underpin laboratory healthcare science in the UK and worldwide.

This presentation will describe the integration and interaction of the HPACC at 3 levels: (i) the integration and coordination of the 4 culture collections within a single business; (ii) the integration of the HPACC within a government health agency and (iii) how government agency and culture collections can interact to service the health service community.

The fundamental requirements of a commercial culture collection apply to all 4 sister collections within the HPACC, specifically: accessioning, banking and authentication, stabilisation and storage, cataloguing, marketing and distribution. However, the specific technologies and processes can vary considerably between collections. The commonalities and major divergences, and how the HPACC reconciles these, will be briefly reviewed.

National culture collections best operate from the public sector. Our parent Health Protection Agency provides logistical support, a research and technology support platform and a clinical / epidemiological network. In particular, the relationship between the HPACC and the Health Protection Agency clinical Reference Microbiology Laboratories will be discussed.

The HPACC provides reference material cell lines and microbial strains that assure the quality of a broad range of healthcare science. Its service to pharmaceutical drug discovery, clinical genetics, clinical diagnosis, food and water testing and epidemiology will be discussed, including its role in the recent flu pandemic.

It is concluded that commercial culture collections will develop as suppliers of reference materials to the increasingly regulated field of healthcare science in the academic, public service and commercial sectors.