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International Recommendations for Paternity Testing Standards

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Paternity testing with DNA techniques is now very powerful and safe if properly performed. In normal paternity cases it is possible to obtain very high weights of the evidence if multiple polymorphic, genetic systems are investigated. Thus, paternity testing with DNA techniques has reached a state where the public trusts in the results of paternity testing due to the mere fact that DNA typing techniques are being used. As anybody knows, the quality of the work and the extent of the DNA investigations may vary. Therefore, many scientists involved in paternity testing want to have guidance or standards for paternity testing.

In this issue, the first International Recommendations for Paternity Testing Standards by the Paternity Testing Commission (PTC) of the International Society for Forensic Genetics (ISFG) are published. The commission members were appointed by the English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Spanish/Portuguese speaking working groups of the ISFG, the American Association of Blood Banks and the ISFG board members also took part in the commission.

Due to the many differences in handling disputed paternity in various countries, it was only possible to formulate basic recommendations for paternity testing laboratories. The recommendations may serve as a platform to develop more detailed local standards addressing the specific technical and legal requirements in a country.

The most important part of the recommendations of the PTC is the recommendation that paternity testing be performed in accordance with the international laboratory standards concerning measurement and testing, the ISO 17025:1999 standards "General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories". Laboratories performing in accordance with the ISO 17025 standards will have the possibility to be accredited by the national accreditation bureau.

The requirements in ISO 17025 are stated in general terms. Therefore, the PTC formulated recommendations that explain and clarify some of the ISO 17025 paragraphs in relation to paternity testing. However, in accordance with the basic idea of the ISO standards, the recommendations do not change any paragraph of the ISO 17025 standards.

Some scientists may be disappointed because the recommendations do not give specific guidance to e.g. the genetic systems of choice, the recommended number of genetic systems investigated, the minimum value of the paternity index, etc. Such decisions must be made locally. However, by recommending the use of the ISO 17025 standards, the ISFG recommendations set basic standards for management of the laboratory, personnel, quality systems, technical performance and reporting that will be a good fundament for local decisions concerning the details of genetic investigations in paternity cases.

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