

Pathology Department

Human Tissue Samples

If any of the body tissue, cells or fluids removed during the management of my condition are not essential for the diagnosis, or would otherwise be discarded as waste, then

(Please initial as appropriate) I AGREE I DISAGREE to their use for teaching or research purposes, as described in the notes to patients section of this form.

Patient's signature Date

Name (PRINT)

Helping you decide

To diagnose your illness and assess the effect of treatment, you will undergo various tests whilst you are under the care of the hospital as either an inpatient or an outpatient. You will be familiar with some of these tests such as X-rays, scans and blood tests. However, you may also have tissue samples taken for diagnosis (a biopsy) or an operation involving removal of diseased tissue.

This information explains to you more about these tissue samples and why we ask if we can keep and store them. It will help you to decide whether you want to give your consent (permission). You can also get advice from the hospital doctor or nurse who is caring for you.

What is a tissue sample?

The human body consists of cells that form tissues such as skin or body organs such as the lungs. Tissue samples consist of cells taken from these tissues or body organs. You will already be familiar with blood



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taken for testing and this is a type of tissue sample. However taking a tissue sample can also involve taking a small sample of a tissue (called a biopsy) or removing part or all of a whole organ.

Why do we take tissue samples?

Small tissue samples (biopsies) are taken in order to diagnose a disease. An example would be a needle biopsy of the liver taken to diagnose suspected liver disease or a breast biopsy to assess whether or not a breast lump is harmless or requires surgery.

In other situations, taking a tissue sample forms part of the treatment of the disease. In this case the diseased tissue, usually part of a body organ is removed. An example of this would be the surgical removal of a cancer. In these cases examination of the tissue removed will allow a better assessment of the next steps in treatment after surgery. We may also take a tissue sample to assess how a patient is responding to treatment.

What happens to tissue samples?

Tissue samples are turned into tissue blocks so that very thin slices of the tissue can be cut and placed on glass slides for examination under the microscope. The tissue blocks are normally 20mm square by 5mm thick and the sections on the slides are very thin, less than five thousandths of a millimeter thick.

For small samples the entire biopsy will be used in this process. However, for large samples such as a body organ removed for cancer, the doctor who examines the tissue will select small portions from the organ for checking under the microscope.

After examining the tissue under the microscope, a report is prepared for your doctor detailing the findings and advising on further treatment.

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Who examines the tissue?

The selection and examination of the tissue is undertaken by a consultant pathologist, a doctor who specialises in the diagnosis of disease, in the laboratory. Pathology is the area of medicine concerned with the diagnosis and development of disease.

What happens to tissue samples when the examination is over?

Blood and Body Fluids

These are usually only kept a few days after a report has been completed. After this they are disposed of as clinical waste.

Solid Tissue from Organs or Biopsies

Solid tissue left over after samples that have been taken for preparation of microscope slides is kept for about 4-6 weeks once the report from the pathologist is complete. This excess tissue is then incinerated in clinical waste.

Foetal Tissue

The wishes of parents will be adhered to with regard to foetal tissue. Where parents do not wish to make a decision regarding foetal tissue these samples are disposed of by communal burial.

Why do you keep tissue blocks and slides?

All over the world, hospitals keep the blocks and slides prepared from the biopsies. Why do they do this?

- Firstly, they form part of the patient's medical record.
- They can be used as a reference to compare how treatment is progressing.

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- They can be used as a reference to decide whether a patient has developed a new disease.
- They can be used in the future to assess whether a patient is suitable for a new treatment that was not available when the diagnosis was first made.
- They may be required for subsequent assessment if the patient has contracted the disease as a result of their job.
- They can be used to check the quality of the work carried out by the consultant pathologist and laboratory staff and help to maintain high standards.
- They can be used in education and training.

Use for Research

Surplus tissue, tissue blocks and slides left over after diagnosis can also provide valuable material for research. The consent form records your consent to material surplus to diagnosis being used for research on a linked anonymised basis, unless you indicate that you do not want it to be used in this way.

Linked anonymised means that researchers who want to use your tissue will not be able to identify you as an individual from your samples. But, suitably authorized staff within Pathology, with password protected access to secure databases, will be able to identify you as an individual using a unique identifying number given to each sample.

Specific details of your treatment, pathological condition etc., relevant to a researcher may be passed on, but this would again be in an anonymised way, unless you have given explicit consent for your details to be shared with research groups.

It is extremely rare for a doctor to take a tissue sample just for research and you would need to give separate consent for this to happen. If tissue

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is to be used for a specific research project where your identity is needed then you will be asked to give your consent for that research.

How are the tissue blocks and slides stored?

The tissue blocks and slides created for microscopic examination are kept for the medical record. They are kept in secure conditions usually within the pathology laboratory.

Is this tissue used for transplantation?

No. Tissue for transplantation is collected separately by the National Blood Transfusion Service, and requires a separate consent process.

Do I need to give my consent for tissue to be taken or stored?

Yes. You should do this when you consent to any test or examination, which involves taking a tissue biopsy or removing tissue during surgery. Your consent covers making the tissue blocks and slides, storing them as part of your medical record and using them for quality assurance, training staff and audit. You may also be asked if tissue left over can be used for teaching or research. In this case, the material and any related clinical information used by the researcher will be anonymised, and only traceable to you by the Hospital Staff, not by the researcher.

What if I refuse?

You can object to any or all of the non-diagnostic uses. This is your decision. Ask to speak to your doctor if you have questions or concerns. Alternatively you may speak to the Clinical Director of Pathology about the storage of tissue, blood and slides.

It will not be possible for the researcher to identify you and to link the tissue with you although the researcher will have access to a summary of medical information that is necessary to explain about the tissue.

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If you wish to object to tissue being kept or used for research, you should contact:

Clinical Director of Pathology
Pathology Department,
UHCW NHS Trust,
Coventry CV2 2DX

Tel 024 7696 8649

Fax 024 7696 5441

Email: uhc-tr.Pathology-Secretaries@nhs.net

Further information

Royal College of Pathologists web site: www.rcpath.org

Human Tissue Authority web site: www.hta.gov.uk

The Human Tissue Act

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/30/contents>

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 7696 7667 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy

To give feedback on this leaflet please email feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk

Document History

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