**Text box 5: The “sample journey”**

*Laboratory request slip to request investigations*

* improves communication between clinical and laboratory staff
* must be readily available in all departments where sample collection takes place
* limited only to tests that the laboratory does, rather than aspires to do, to avoid frustration to clinicians!
* an adaptable template showing essential information is available (27).

*Sample collection*

* sample collection area should be clean, well lit, quiet and screened off from the laboratory and patient waiting area
* acknowledge local greetings and put the patient and parent/carer at ease by speaking to them in a professional and pleasant manner; especially in children who are often frightened and upset
* Always explain what you are going to do and why you are doing it
* ensure that everything needed is to hand
* following collection, briefly review the patient and ensure that the puncture site has stopped bleeding
* transfer the blood samples to the laboratory immediately

*Reception in laboratory and sample log*

* ensure samples are in good condition, clearly labeled and have an accompanying laboratory request form with matching patient information
* reject samples that are leaking, clotted or where patient information is inadequate and request a repeat sample immediately
* record patient details (full name, date of birth, hospital or clinic number, ward), laboratory tests requested and the time and date of receipt in log book

*Analyses*

* Follow standard operating procedure (SOP) for each assay to ensure that equipment is operated correctly, safely and efficiently and procedures are carried out consistently by different members of staff
* refer to trouble-shooting advice in the SOP for common problems that arise
* make SOPs readily available especially where staff turnover is high
* Perform all measurements in duplicate or, where reagents are scarce, repeat measurements in every nth sample
* templates for laboratory SOPs are readily available (28).

*Step 4: Reporting of results*

* check that results are presented clearly and correspond with the patient details
* use the correct units and include normal reference ranges
* confirm any abnormal results before reporting to the clinician or ward staff
* be alert to results that are not in keeping with the clinical information provided on the laboratory form as these need particularly careful review
* reporting must be timely to ensure that the patient receives prompt treatment
* keep a separate record of all tests that can not be completed immediately and notify the clinician that the missing result will follow on
* follow up on any outstanding results