

## I 6-7: Storing documents and records

### Where to keep documents and records

Storage must be given careful consideration, as the main goal of documentation is finding the information when it is needed.

### Using a paper system

It is important to consider the following when using a paper system for records:

- **Permanence**—paper records must last for as long as needed. This should be ensured by binding pages together, or using a bound book (log register). Pages should be numbered for easy access, and permanent ink should be used.
- **Accessibility**—paper systems should be designed so that information can be easily retrieved whenever needed.
- **Security**—documents and records must be kept in a secure place. Security considerations include maintaining patient confidentiality. Care should be taken to keep documents safe from any environmental hazards such as spills. Consider how records can be protected in the event of fires, floods or other possibilities.
- **Traceability**—it should be possible to trace a sample throughout all processes in the laboratory, and later to be able to see who collected the sample, who ran the test, and what the quality control results were for the test run, including issuing of the report. This is important in the event there are questions or problems about any reported laboratory result. All records should be signed, dated and reviewed to ensure that this traceability throughout the laboratory has been maintained.

### Using an electronic system

Electronic systems have essentially the same requirements as paper systems. However, the methods for meeting these requirements will be different when using computers. The following are factors to consider:

- **Permanence**—backup systems are essential in case the main system fails. Additionally, regular maintenance of the computer system will help to reduce system failures and loss of data.
- **Security**—it can be more difficult to assure confidentiality with a computer system, as many people may have access to the data. However, computer access codes can be established to protect the data.
- **Traceability**—electronic record systems should be designed in a way that allows for tracing the specimen throughout the entire process in the laboratory. Six months after performing an examination, it should be possible to look at the records and determine who collected the specimen and who ran the test.

### Record retention

Retention times for records should be determined in each laboratory, based on a number of factors:

- the length of time the laboratory will need to have access to its records;
- government requirements or standards that dictate record retention times;
- whether the laboratory is engaged in ongoing research requiring many years of data;
- the time interval between the laboratory's assessments or audits.