

## Common Questions

### 1. "Unfortunately the sample has been frozen - is it any use?"

- When frozen tissue thaws, it results in considerable artefact damage due to intracellular ice crystals. Whilst some damage is unavoidable, acceptable results can often be achieved if the sample is allowed to defrost in a container of formalin placed in the fridge.

### 2. "I have taken a biopsy and now find that we have no fixative in the practice."

- If you place the biopsy in isotonic saline (drip solution), it can be safely kept in the fridge for a few hours until you can obtain some fixative. Acceptable results have been achieved with samples kept in this way for up to a day.

### 3. "I need to take a biopsy but my patient is a poor anaesthetic risk."

- Core biopsies taken from subcutaneous sites using a True-cut or a 16G needle and then expressed into formalin can give worthwhile results. They can usually be taken using only local anaesthesia and sedation. Results are typically much more useful than a fine needle aspirate. Ideally take more than one sample to increase the likelihood of a representative section.

### 4. "There is no submission form in the packaging!"

- We have had reports of packaging lacking submission forms. On further enquiry this has usually turned out to be because the outer box has been discarded with the paperwork left inside it. The outer box contains four separate packages together with four loose submission forms bearing your practice address label. The forms are **not** inside the small cardboard boxes inside the Jiffy bags. This is because we receive the packages pre-packed by our supplier and add the forms to the outer box when we address the box for posting.

### 5. "Since we started to use the smaller pots, we have had several non-diagnostic samples."

- Since the introduction of the new, smaller packaging to comply with Royal Mail regulations, particularly the 30ml "pillar box friendly" bottles, we have had problems of inadequately fixed samples. Please remember that a sample should, ideally, be fixed in ten times its own volume of fixative. Obviously the average mammary tumour is too large to fix adequately if placed whole into a small pot. The most important area of a tumour to examine is the periphery; if you take slices, each about 0.5 – 0.75cm thick, which extend from the surrounding tissue into the substance of the mass, fixation will be much improved, resulting in less delays due to poor fixation/processing. Also remember that fixed tissue becomes rigid – do not mould the sample to fit the bottle or we end up with a sample closely resembling a sausage which is almost impossible to orientate! Always bear in mind that a special trip to the Post Office with one of the larger pots may pay in terms of a higher diagnostic yield.