

Laboratory technicians signing pathology reports can put our lives at risk.

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According to recent newspaper reports, in many pathology laboratories across the state, laboratory technicians, and not pathologists are signing medical reports. The Medical Council of India (MCI) does not allow such diploma holders to sign reports. Laboratory technicians do not have any authority to certify any pathology report and the MCI has passed directives on this matter several times in the past.

Laboratory technicians can only collect samples and assist qualified pathologists. Legally, they cannot carry out any investigation or sign reports as many a times, a wrong analysis can result in false positives scaring a patient, and leading to wrong treatment. Doctors say such malpractice is a threat to unsuspecting patients as a laboratory technician reports machine values and blindly signs the report.

Laboratory technicians, in any case, are not qualified to carry out clinical co-relations in human patients. In case an erroneous value reporting takes place due to some deviation in calibration of a machine, a laboratory technician will not be able to

identify the mistake. A pathologist normally must observe sample slides. When this does not happen, technicians not qualified to read slides may, report ailments like say, malaria or dengue to be positive though a patient may have another infection. MBBS doctors need to do a post graduation in pathology to be a pathologist, recognized by the MCI. Laboratory technicians who sign reports are clearly violating MCI guidelines.

According to Maharashtra Association of Practicing Pathologists and Microbiologists (MAPPM), an umbrella body of qualified pathologists, there are more than 15,000 path labs across Maharashtra, of which 1,600 are in Mumbai, Navi Mumbai and Thane. Mumbai gets about good number of 50 qualified post-graduate pathologists per year. Doctors across sectors are livid that laboratory technicians are running shop, though high courts of up to four Indian states have passed interim orders that only a qualified pathologist can sign diagnostic reports. Many pathologists whose names figure on reports do not actually sign, according

to MAPPM; Laboratories misuse their names or forge their signatures with or without the knowledge of the pathologist. MAPPM has written to state authorities that laboratory technicians are openly flouting court orders despite interim orders of various high courts, including Bombay High Court, clearly stating that only a pathologist having an MBBS, MD degree can run a laboratory and sign medical reports.

Mushrooming laboratories are a cause of concern. Anyone can open a pathology laboratory by only acquiring a Shops and Establishments Licence from the civic body showing that there is a pathologist on the rolls. The state does not carry out due diligence to ensure that a qualified pathologist is present at all times to sign reports.

Only regular audit by the regulatory authorities can crack down on such malpractices detrimental to consumers.

