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How useful are complete blood count and reticulocyte reports to clinicians in Addis Ababa hospitals, Ethiopia?

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Background: Complete blood count (CBC) and reticulocyte (Retics) are routine hematology tests useful for the differential diagnosis of anemia and other medical conditions. However, it has been presumed that they are not used as regular as they should be in medical practice in Addis Ababa hospitals.

Methods: A hospital-based cross-sectional questionnaire survey was conducted during November-December 2010, in which 408 clinicians participated and their response on the use of CBC and Retics was assessed. The always/frequently (A/F) response was considered to reflect routine use of the CBC/Retics parameters by the clinicians. The Chi square test was used to study statistical associations among different variables.

Result: Only four of 13 parameters in CBC were frequently or always used by more than 85% of the clinicians. Health officers were observed to use 12 of the 13 CBC parameters less than the other professional group; interns and residents demonstrated highest use of CBC results. More than a third of clinicians' preferred white blood cell (WBC) differential report in percentages than the more useful absolute number report. Reticulocyte parameters were not being used by majority of clinicians in patient management. Clinicians rated 'average' regarding the adequacy of clinical laboratory methods course they took during medical education. As service users, clinicians indicated mm³ as unit of preference in cell count on the laboratory report form.

Conclusion: Overall, most clinicians do not use much of the data provided on routine CBC report. Additional research is needed to understand the issue further. Responsible bodies should promote the appropriate use of CBC/Retics reports by clinicians.

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