

Letter

The Variability of Antinuclear Antibody Testing

To the Editor:

The group from the College of American Pathologists¹ have carried out an extensive survey of the approaches to antinuclear antibody testing by different laboratories, predominantly in the USA. They reviewed the techniques used and possible reasons for the variations in results. They observed that the screening serum titer differed among the laboratories and suggested that “it is critical for the clinician to know what titer cutoff was utilized” in the presentation of the results. Although this clearly can affect the background positivity rate, so can many other variables, as they noted. I therefore believe it is more important to state the false positivity rate directly in each laboratory report. This will vary in different laboratories.

In our own laboratory we chose to continue with the traditional cutoff dilution of 1/40, but diluting conjugate reduced the test sensitivity so that only some 5% of normal sera were positive,² whereas in some laboratories it has been as high as 30%.³ Knowledge of this feature is required to allow a clinician to interpret the result provided and form an idea of the posttest probability—something the cutoff titer alone cannot provide.

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