A message on vitamin D testing from the Division of Clinical Chemistry, CDHA Laboratory

With the summer months now upon us there is an expectation within CDHA laboratories that the number of requests for vitamin D testing would significantly decline. This trend however has not yet been observed, and if anything the previous month saw a significant upward shift of numbers from around 1,200 to 1,800, which could perhaps be explained by a recent CBC program advocating the importance of vitamin D. We do agree that vitamin D is important- **but it is important to supplement and not to test**, so we would like to highlight this essential point.

It is documented that each year, between the months of October- April over 80% of the healthy population in Canada are at risk of developing vitamin D deficiency in the absence of adequate supplementation. It is therefore recommended that healthy adult individuals take a daily vitamin D dose of between 1000- 2000 IU, without the need for testing. Children require between 400-800 IU/day. **This is both practical and economical, given that the total cost of performing one Vitamin D test ($5.18 for reagents; $10.50 total cost) is greater than one year's supplement ($7.99 for 720 tablets, strength=1000IU- Kirkland).** Testing however may be appropriate in certain high risk groups such as patients diagnosed with, or suspected to have, hypercalcemia (calcium and vitamin D should both be tested in these patients).

This recommendation is in line with that adopted by the 'Choosing Wisely Canada' program, from the American campaign, and advises: '***Don't perform population based screening for 25-OH-Vitamin D deficiency: Over the counter Vitamin D supplements and increased summer sun exposure are sufficient for most otherwise healthy patients…'***

On a final note we would like to remind our clinical users that appropriate utilization of laboratory tests not only makes efficiency savings that can be channeled towards improving services and providing more innovative tests, but also saves your time and effort in pursuing 'abnormal' results that carry no true clinical significance.

If you have any questions or comments about this or other clinical chemistry related issues, please contact Dr. Elnenaei at 902-473-5194, Dr. Lou at 902-473-1528, or Dr Nassar at 902-473-2225