

Tissue Procurement Service: Frequently Asked Questions (revised February 26, 2003)

1. What is the Tissue Procurement Service?

The TPS is based within the Surgical Pathology Laboratory of the University of Michigan Hospital with the function of prospectively obtaining surgically-resected tissue for research while safeguarding all aspects of patient care. The TPS is authorized by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to obtain tissue for research that is otherwise resected for medical purposes. The major resource available for this task is a skilled technologist who will work with surgeons, investigators and pathologists to process acquired tissue to maximize its scientific value without compromising diagnostic processing. This technologist will also oversee designation of diagnostic histologic sections so that investigators can correlate pathologic features with their data. In addition, the TPS provides investigators access to histopathologic parameters available from the final diagnostic report while preserving patient confidentiality. This TPS is funded by the N.C.I., and services are provided without charge.

2. Who can use the TPS?

Any member of the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center is eligible. (Applications for Comprehensive Cancer Center membership can be obtained from Mary Rexer at 936-3371.)

3. What types of processing are available for procured tissue?

Tissues may be obtained fresh (including sterile for establishment of cell culture, as below) or frozen in liquid nitrogen. Touch preparations of cells are also available. The technologist responsible for procuring tissue will work with each investigator to maximize the value of the tissue for particular scientific studies.

4. How is sterile tissue procured?

Sterile instruments for this purpose will be maintained in the Surgical Pathology accessioning area. Surgeons will be requested to send specimens designated for sterile procurement in a sterile basin covered with sterile towels. Sterile tissue for cell culture work has been successfully obtained from numerous specimens using sterile instruments and appropriate technique. Tissue may be procured without microbial contamination even when (non-sterile) ink is applied to the outside of the specimens for diagnostic purposes (i.e., designation of margins).

5. Does the TPS supply tissue culture media?

Investigators who wish sterile specimens to be placed in tissue culture media should provide media to the TPS. Aliquots of media can be stored at 4°C in advance in the Surgical Pathology accessioning area.

6. If the surgeon performing the operation agrees (or if I am a surgeon acquiring tissue for my own research), can tissue be acquired in the operating room without having to be sent to Pathology first?

Generally no. The PS is the only IRB-approved methods of obtaining tissues from surgical specimens. Exceptions include specimen protocols in which the tissue is required for preparation of a therapeutic agent.

7. When are tissue procurement services available?

Generally, tissue can be procured during the normal working hours of our Tissue Procurement Pathologist, 8:30 am to 5:00 pm, Monday-Friday. Procurement outside of those times (or on scheduled vacation days) cannot be assured, but may be possible by special arrangement with the Tissue Procurement technologist.

8. Do I have to know when a surgical procedure is going to be performed in order to have tissue procured from it?

The TPS usually obtains information regarding specimens by reviewing each day's operative schedule in advance and by working with surgical pathologists. Thus, placement by the investigator of a "standing order" for tissue of a given type is generally the easiest and most successful means for tissue procurement. In addition, if an investigator has advance knowledge of a specific case of interest, especially those involving unusual diagnoses or patients with particular clinical characteristics, we ask that she or he notifies the Tissue Procurement technologist in advance. We will process all requests for tissue from specific cases that are received by 4:00 on the previous (working) day before surgery. The Tissue Procurement technologist will notify the charge nurse of each day's cases from which tissue is to be obtained so that these specimens will be handled properly.

The most effective procurement of tissue often results from close collaboration between surgeon and investigator, and communication between investigator and the Tissue Procurement technologist. Because the difficulty of acquiring tissue may vary with tissue type, the number of investigators needing tissue from a given specimen, and the requirements of amount and processing, each investigator should discuss his or her needs with the Tissue Procurement technologist after approval is granted.

9. How is procured tissue transferred to the investigator?

The TPS technologist will be notified when a requested specimen is received in the Surgical Pathology Accessioning area. He or she will process the tissue and, if appropriate, call the individual specified as a contact person on the "Application for Enrollment." Arrangements for specimen transfer may need to vary with circumstances, however, and may be individualized with the TPS technologist.

Users of the TPS should note that clinical demands on the Surgical Pathology personnel prevent them from contacting other individuals besides the TPS technologist when specimens are received for procurement.

10. Can I get histologic frozen sections prepared?

Although the TPS can obtain and freeze tissue, we do not prepare frozen sections for investigators. However, frozen sections can be obtained through a related service, the Histology/Immunoperoxidase Service for a minimal fee per slide. This can be discussed with the TPS Technologist who can provide the appropriate forms and answer questions if need for this service is determined.

11. Does the TPS manage a "Frozen Tissue Bank?"

The resources of the TPS are primarily designed to prospectively procure tissue for investigators. However, a Frozen Tumor Bank has been recently established. As significant numbers of tissues are beginning to accumulate, we will shortly make these available to investigators. A separate request will be needed to access these tissues.

12. When is Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval required for procurement of tissue for research?

Procurement of any tissue that is linked to the patient from whom it was procured requires IRB approval. However, you will first need a letter of approval from the TPS before IRB approval is granted.

IRB approval is not required, however, for procurement of limited number of normal tissue specimens that will be used only as controls rather than as the subject of analysis themselves. The IRB co-chairs are Drs. Vernon Sondak and Robert Cody. They are willing to answer specific questions about IRB approval.

13. How do I initiate procurement of tissue?

Contact Dr. Thomas Giordano, Department of Pathology, 2G332 University Hospitals, Box 0054, 936-6776, giordano@umich.edu, for an application form or download it from the Giordano Lab Webpage under the Tissue Core section.

Documentation of I.R.B. approval must be obtained prior to commencement of tissue procurement, except for special situations as described above. (Application for IRB approval should be submitted to the IRB office address above.) A copy of notification of IRB approval must be received by the TPS before acquisition of tissue can commence.

Notification of approval (“Approval for Services of the TPS”) in most cases takes less than two weeks.

14. Once I am enrolled in the TPS, how long is the enrollment active?

Each year (in January or February), all Approval for Services of the TPS of over 10 months duration must be renewed. This renewal, which consists of a very simple form, enables us to maintain current records of active users and provides us with the opportunity of documenting publications resulting from the TPS which will be used to renew the funding necessary for its continued operation.

15. Who do I contact for application forms or further questions?

Questions regarding the TPS should be directed to the Dr. Thomas Giordano (giordano@umich.edu).