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## COMMON TEST FOR URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS A CLEAR FAILURE

A common medical test used to diagnose urinary tract infections (UTI) has been deemed ‘a hopeless dud’ by medical researchers who are calling for doctors to abandon the test.

A recent study at the University College London (UCL) looked at the accuracy of the midstream urine culture (MSU) test, proving its failures once and for all following numerous other studies discrediting its performance.

The study used cutting edge DNA analysis to detect urinary pathogens and compared the results with the traditional MSU culture. The latter failed to detect a variety of bacterial species—identifying just six infections in 33 patients with UTI symptoms attending their first appointment at a specialist UTI clinic in London, and 30 of the clinic’s existing patients. Alarming, MSU culture could not distinguish between patients with UTI and a control group who had no UTI symptoms at all.

The MSU culture test was originally introduced in the 1950s to diagnose potentially life-threatening acute kidney infections. It was soon adopted globally as the ‘gold standard’ diagnostic test for common acute UTIs, despite this being a condition it was not designed to diagnose.

UCL Professor Emeritus James Malone-Lee, one of the paper’s authors and a consulting physician specialising in complicated and chronic UTI for nearly 40 years, says although the MSU culture test is proven to be insensitive and misleading, it somehow remains the ‘gold standard’ diagnostic test—much to patients’ detriment.

“For decades, patients suffering appalling symptoms have been betrayed by a urine test that isn’t working. All too often, those afflicted are spurned by health carers who are duped by this investigation,” Malone-Lee said. “This new study proves that the gold standard test, used throughout the healthcare system, is a hopeless dud incapable of distinguishing infected patients from normal controls. It is a deplorable situation.”

Chronic UTI Australia spokesperson, Deirdre Pinto says patients being failed by UTI tests is more common than most people realise, and lack of UTI treatment is causing chronic embedded urinary infections. “We come across people every day online, mostly women but sometimes young children and men, who have been failed time and again by standard UTI tests.

“They see their GP thinking they have a UTI, only to be told the test is negative—there is ‘no infection’. We have great concerns over the heavy reliance on these tests given they are discredited by research scientists,” Pinto said.

“Our chronic UTI network is full of people sharing similar stories of being let down by health practitioners and left to suffer—often for years—with undiagnosed festering infections, simply because the test failed to pick it up. Many are diagnosed with incurable urinary syndromes like interstitial cystitis, painful bladder syndrome and overactive bladder syndrome. It isn’t until they are diagnosed and properly treated for embedded UTI that they begin, slowly, to get better.

“The chronic UTI network is full of knowledgeable women who are staying on top of the science, communicating firsthand with scientists all over the world and sharing information with the community and their own doctors. The knowledge transfer is quite incredible and powerful. But, obviously, this is an unacceptable situation and current testing practices must change.”

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‘Reassessment of Routine Midstream Culture in Diagnosis of Urinary Tract Infection’, Journal of Clinical Microbiology, Jan 2019, <https://jcm.asm.org/content/early/2018/12/10/JCM.01452-18>