Collecting Hair Samples for Toxicology

The medico-legal guidelines and recommendations published by the FFLM are for general information only. Appropriate specific advice should be sought from your medical defence organisation or professional association. The Faculty has one or more senior representatives of the MDOs on its Board, but for the avoidance of doubt, endorsement of the medico-legal guidelines or recommendations published by the FFLM has not been sought from any of the medical defence organisations.

Hair sample collection kits are available. The following are guidelines for when the kits are not being used or are not available and a hair sample is being taken from a live examinee.

**Method of Sampling**

1. A lock of hair, approximately the width of a pencil, should ideally be taken. This should preferably be taken from the vertex posterior (back of the head below the crown).

2. Wearing gloves, select a suitable lock of hair and tie the lock near the scalp with thread or string (to keep the hairs aligned).

3. Using a clean pair of scissors, cut the lock of hair as close to the scalp as possible. Leave the thread/string on the lock of hair.

4. Place the lock of hair in aluminium foil or clean piece of paper. Annotate on the foil/paper which is the ‘cut’ end of the lock i.e. the end that was closest to the scalp. It is important for the laboratory to be able to distinguish the alignment of the lock.

5. Fold over the foil or paper to enclose the hair lock. Place in a tamper-evident bag.

6. Record whether the examinee uses any cosmetic treatments on their hair (e.g. dyeing, bleaching, perming, straightening etc.) and the dates of any such treatments between the incident and sampling.

**Alternatives**

- If the hair is very short and it is not possible to tie off a lock, then a ‘tuft’ of hair should be collected and placed in foil or paper.

- If head hair is not available, then an alternative site can be used (pubic, axillary etc.).

**Packaging and Storage**

Hair samples for toxicology must not be frozen or refrigerated, but stored dry, at normal room temperature.


Produced by Fiona Perry on behalf of the FFLM Forensic Science Subcommittee