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The need for European professional standards and the challenges facing clinical microbiology.

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Microorganisms spread across national boundaries and the professional activities of clinical (medical) microbiologists are critical in minimising their impact. Clinical microbiologists participate in many activities, e.g. diagnosis, antibiotic therapy, and there is a need for a set of professional standards for Europe with a common curriculum, to build upon the current strengths of the specialty and to facilitate the free movement of specialists within the European Union. Such standards will also better highlight the important contribution of clinical microbiologists to healthcare. There is a move to larger centralised microbiology laboratories often located off-site from an acute hospital, driven by the concentration of resources, amalgamation of services, outsourcing of diagnostics, automation, an explosion in the range of staff competencies and accreditation. Large off-site centralised microbiology laboratories are often distant to the patient and may not facilitate the early detection of microbial spread. Ultimately, the needs of patients and the public are paramount in deciding on the future direction of clinical microbiology. Potential conflicts between integration on an acute hospital site and centralisation can be resolved by a common set of professional standards and a team-based approach that puts patients first.

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