



Technical Report No. 80

Data Integrity Management System for Pharmaceutical Laboratories

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Technical Report No. 20

ISBN 978-1-945584-05-3

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Table of Contents

1.0 INTRODUCTION	1	6.3.5 Data Generation	27
1.1 Purpose.....	2	6.3.6 Injection Sequences	28
1.2 Scope	2	6.3.7 Data Processing and Peak Integration	29
2.0 GLOSSARY OF TERMS.....	3	6.3.8 Results Printing or Publishing	34
2.1 Acronyms	6	6.3.9 Audit Trails	34
3.0 REGULATORY TRENDS	7	6.3.9.1 System-Level Audit Trail	35
4.0 GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE CONTROL OF DATA INTEGRITY IN THE LABORATORY	9	6.3.9.2 Application-Level Audit Trail	36
4.1 Original Records	9	6.3.9.3 Method Audit Trail	36
4.2 Human Factors	10	6.3.9.4 Results Audit Trail	37
5.0 DATA INTEGRITY IN THE PHARMACEUTICAL MICROBIOLOGY LABORATORY	11	6.3.9.5 Sequence Audit Trail	37
5.1 General Considerations and Risks.....	11	6.3.9.6 Project-Level Audit Trail.....	38
5.1.1 Interviewing Analysts.....	11	6.3.9.7 Injection Log.....	39
5.1.2 On-site Laboratory and Sampling Review ..	12	6.3.10 Transactional Log/System Errors	39
5.1.3 Worksheet Review.....	13	6.3.10.1 Chromatography.....	39
5.1.4 Contract Laboratories	13	6.3.10.2 Other Types of Equipment	40
5.1.5 Equipment and Instrument Review	14	6.3.11 Common Deficiencies	41
5.2 Testing for Environmental Monitoring, Sterility, and Bacterial Endotoxins.....	15	6.4 Other Laboratory Equipment	42
5.2.1 Environmental Monitoring Equipment	15	6.5 Laboratory Data Management Software	43
5.2.2 Air Sampling Devices.....	15	6.5.1 Controls	43
5.2.3 Surface and Personnel Monitoring Equipment.....	16	6.5.2 Common Deficiencies that May Lead to Data Corruption	44
5.2.4 Review of Sterility Test.....	16	6.5.3 Spreadsheet Validation.....	44
5.2.5 Bacterial Endotoxin Testing	18	6.5.3.1 Spreadsheet Controls.....	44
6.0 DATA INTEGRITY IN THE ANALYTICAL QUALITY CONTROL LABORATORY	19	6.5.3.2 Common Deficiencies in Spreadsheets...45	
6.1 General Considerations and Risks.....	19	6.6 Electronic Data Governance	46
6.2 Hybrid Systems	19	6.6.1 Data Backup and Storage.....	46
6.2.1 Associated Risk	20	6.6.2 Routine Checks of Data and Multiple Equipment in the Laboratory.....	47
6.2.2 Qualification	20	6.6.3 Communications with Chromatographic Software Vendors	48
6.3 Analytical Laboratory Computerized Systems (COTS)	21	6.6.4 Presenting Data on Request in Electronic Format for Audits and Inspections.....	48
6.3.1 Qualification of Computer Server and/or Virtual System	23	7.0 RISK MANAGEMENT OF DATA GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS	48
6.3.2 Commercial Off-the-Shelf Software Validation for HPLC, GC, and other Instrument Operations.....	25	7.1 Risk Assessment.....	48
6.3.2.1 Controls for COTS Software for HPLC, GC, and Other Instrument Operations.....	26	7.2 Risk-Based Mitigation	49
6.3.3 Laboratory Instrument Functionality and Qualification	26	8.0 HOW TO REMEDIATE BREACHES IN DATA INTEGRITY	50
6.3.4 Data Governance — Generating, Processing, Reporting, and Archiving.....	27	8.1 Discovery of Data Integrity Issues in Pharmaceutical Laboratories.....	50
		8.2 Investigation Considerations	50
		8.3 Comprehensive Assessment of Systems	51
		8.4 Corrective and Preventive Action Plans.....	52
		9.0 CONCLUSION	53
		10.0 REFERENCES.....	53

FIGURES AND TABLES INDEX

Figure 5.2.2-1	Misreading of EM Plates	16	Figure 6.3.7-7b	Multicomponent Peaks Integrated with Suitable Peak Width and Threshold	33
Figure 5.2.4-1	Membrane Location	17	Figure 6.3.7-5f	Raw Data Integrated Peak Followed by a Negative Peak or Drift	33
Figure 5.2.4-2	Hygroscopic Product	17	Figure 6.3.7-6c	Co-eluting Peaks Integrated with Improper Integration Events, Presents Less Response.....	33
Figure 5.2.4-3	Device Placement	17	Figure 6.3.7-7c	One Peak Integrated with Peak Trimming and another Peak by Integrating Tailing, Fronting.....	33
Figure 6.2-1	Data Flow in Hybrid Analytical Systems	20	Figure 6.3.9-1	Example of an Audit Trail Summary.	35
Figure 6.3-1	Sample Data Flow and Audit Trail Points in an ALCS	23	Figure 6.3.9.1-1	System Audit Trail (Default).....	36
Table 6.3.1-1	Key Terms and References for Automated Systems Requirements ...	25	Figure 6.3.9.1-2	System Audit Trail for Project Deletion	36
Figure 6.3.5-1	Typical Data Flow in Chromatographic Analysis.....	28	Figure 6.3.9.4-1	Result Audit Trail Report	37
Figure 6.3.7-1	Typical Overlaid Chromatogram of Two Injections (Standard and Sample) Integrated with Same Integration Events.....	29	Figure 6.3.9.4-2	Filter to Search Sample in Multiple Projects	38
Figure 6.3.7-2	Typical Chromatogram with Integration Type (Manual/Chromatographic Software)	31	Figure 6.3.9.5-1	Sample Set Audit Trail Report.....	38
Figure 6.3.7-3	Chromatogram with Appropriate Integration Events	31	Figure 6.3.9.6-1	Project Audit Trail – Deleted Injection	38
Figure 6.3.7-4a	Chromatogram of Related Substances Analysis Presented with an Improper Scale	31	Figure 6.3.10.1-1	Example of a Transactional Log	39
Figure 6.3.7-4b	Chromatogram of Related Substances Analysis Presented with Appropriate Scale	32	Figure 6.3.10.1-2	Example of a System Error Log	39
Figure 6.3.7-5a	Raw Data of a Single Component Analysis before Integrating	32	Figure 6.3.10.2-1	Example of a Transactional Log for XRD.....	40
Figure 6.3.7-5b	Raw Data Integrated with Proper Peak Width and Threshold	32	Figure 6.3.10.2-2	Example of a Transactional Log for KF	41
Figure 6.3.7-5c	Raw Data Integrated with Improper Integration Events Leading to Peak Trimming	32	Figure 6.5.3.1-1	Example of Validated, Protected Spreadsheet	44
Figure 6.3.7-5d	Raw Data Not Integrated Base to Base	33	Figure 6.5.3.2-1	Validated Spreadsheet: API Assay Failure (Failure Result is 96.30).....	45
Figure 6.3.7-6a	Raw Data of Co-eluting Peaks of Related Substance Analysis	33	Figure 6.5.3.2-2	Modified Standard Average Change Value in Spreadsheet for Assay Preparation 1.....	45
Figure 6.3.7-7a	Raw Data of Multicomponent Analysis	33	Figure 6.6-1	Typical Analytical Laboratory Data Mapping.....	46
Figure 6.3.7-7e	Raw Data Integrated with Peak Tailing	33	Table 6.6.1-1	Example of a Table in a Laboratory Manual	47
Figure 6.3.7-7b	Co-eluting Peaks Integrated with Suitable Peak Width and Threshold ...	33	Figure 6.6.2-1	Typical Data Reconciliation Exercise.	47
			Figure 7.2-1	Risk Matrix Example for Microbiological Testing.....	49

1.0 Introduction

A primary responsibility of pharmaceutical manufacturers is to provide safe and efficacious products of appropriate quality to patients and consumers by assuring decisions are based on accurate, reliable, truthful, and complete data. Data integrity is a mandatory requirement and key concern of health authorities. At the time of this writing, data integrity citations, especially those related to computerized systems in laboratory and manufacturing environments, have resulted in a number of significant, well-publicized enforcement actions from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other regulatory authorities, including the United Kingdom Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), and European Medicines Agency (EMA). These enforcement actions have taken the form of warning letters, import alerts, statements of GMP noncompliance, notices of concern, and refusals to accept and/or approve applications. Many of these actions involve failing to document or report alterations, deletions, fabrications, and/or misrepresentations of data in quality control laboratories. The range of data integrity findings spans the spectrum from unintentional errors in data reporting and lack of controls necessary to ensure data authenticity to intentional acts involving failure to report data and/or falsification of records.

The spike in enforcement actions, in part, is linked to improved detection capabilities, which have become more prevalent as technological enhancements have extended the level of automation in both pharmaceutical quality control and microbiology laboratories. The extensive use of computer systems and digital media for product testing, as well as in ancillary support systems, provides more visibility to data integrity gaps than was evident with static paper records.

The consequences of failing to uncover data integrity problems through self-discovery or internal audit programs before they are found by regulatory agency inspectors can impact the outcome of the inspection in ways that could be very damaging to a business. Similarly, the business impact on contract manufacturers, contract laboratories, and suppliers can be very serious if they fail to uncover and disclose data integrity problems before regulators or their customers' auditors do. One of the responsibilities of regulatory agency investigators is to verify the accuracy, reliability, and integrity of data submitted in written form or other media prior to, during, or after an inspection, or as part of a drug submission for market authorization, annual report, mandatory quality defect report (e.g., Field Alert), or Adverse Event Report. The regulatory investigators (also referred to as inspectors in some regulatory regions) may detect and document inconsistencies between the information provided and available for review that may suggest data integrity problems that the company will need to correct. Such inconsistencies can be used by the health authority as the basis for a regulatory action or formal written communication. From the regulators' perspective, noncompliance with good data integrity practices is not based solely on the intent to mislead authorities to believe that all laboratory activities are performed according to current good manufacturing practices (CGMP) when they are not. Requirements for appropriate laboratory records and documentation began with the first GMP regulations and expectations have been clarified in other publications such as the FDA Guide to Inspections of Pharmaceutical Quality Control Laboratories published in 1993 (1).

In some instances, a regulatory agency may decide to ban products from entering its jurisdiction and order or recommend that the potentially affected product be removed from the market.¹ Regulatory agencies and organizations that oversee a manufacturing site's adherence to CGMPs have made significant efforts to communicate their expectations to both industry and their inspectorates about managing data and ensuring its integrity. Some of these expectations can be found in the U.S. FDA *Draft Guidance for Industry on Data Integrity and Compliance with CGMP* (April 2016), World Health Organization (WHO) *Guidance on Good Data and Record Management Practices* (May 2016), Draft PIC/S *Guidance Good Practices for Data Management and Integrity in Regulated GMP/GDP Environments* (August 2016), MHRA *GXP Data Integrity Definitions and Guidance* (March 2018), *Guidance for Industry, Part 11, Electronic Records; Electronic Signatures—Scope and Application* (August 2003),

¹ Some regulatory agencies have the legal authority to order product removal from the market, while others can only recommend such actions.

and *EU Annex 11: Computerised Systems* (June 2011) (2–8). Even older health authority publications on traditional audit practices may also be helpful in identifying and preventing data integrity issues in laboratories. Some examples include: FDA Guide to Inspections of Pharmaceutical Quality Control Laboratories (1) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) Questions and Answers: Good Manufacturing Practice–Data Integrity (9).

This increased focus on data integrity by health authority investigators has resulted in the need for firms to modify and harmonize strategies to address data integrity gaps in a manner that promotes transparency, accuracy, and reliability of data as well as detection of data integrity breaches.

Industry can use technology shifts, along with the new awareness that stems from recent regulatory sanctions, to enhance their efforts to improve processes and establish mechanisms for detection and mitigation of gaps that impact data integrity in paper, hybrid, and computerized systems. The overall goal of ensuring data reliability is to protect patients as well as provide competitive sustainability.

1.1 Purpose

This technical report, developed by subject matter experts from the global pharmaceutical industry and regulatory agencies, summarizes data integrity risks and the best practices, including audit approaches, that can be utilized to develop a robust data integrity management system for laboratory settings with both manual and electronic processes that firms can follow to achieve compliance and mitigate risks. Current regulatory trends indicate breaches in data integrity and a need for additional guidance regarding the regulatory expectations. The intent of this report is to outline regulatory requirements and expectations, along with best industry practices to ensure data integrity, to highlight common gaps in laboratory data management practices, and to recommend methods of remediation.

For the purpose of this report, the term “data integrity” means the degree to which data are complete, consistent, accurate, trustworthy, and reliable and that these characteristics of the data are maintained (3) to support the quality of drug products throughout their lifecycle from the point of development through commercialization. The reliability of such data is necessary to support clinical trials, product development, manufacturing, testing, and regulatory reporting requirements, all of which are dependent on the processes and controls in place from the point of data creation to ensure data cannot be altered, deleted, omitted, or in any way modified to misrepresent what actually occurred. Data integrity is the cornerstone of establishing and maintaining confidence in the reliability of data.

1.2 Scope

This technical report focuses on the management of data integrity within pharmaceutical quality control analytical and microbiology laboratories and is also applicable to analytical development and R&D laboratories. It provides the framework and tools necessary to establish a robust data integrity management system to ensure data integrity for paper, hybrid, and computerized systems within the laboratory.