

ARTHRITIS & RHEUMATISM PRACTICE ENJOYS
RENEWED FLEXIBILITY
Sebia's HYDRASYS gives in-house lab greater freedom
and control over testing options



Pictured left to right: Dr. Robert Rosenberg, Jeannette Eaton and Vincent Calhoun

Time is a cruel companion for a patient in pain. As bones ache, the individual is desperate for fast answers and immediate relief. Meanwhile, the medical team tries to put the various puzzle pieces together to accurately diagnose their condition — without going through unneeded steps or protracted examinations that cripple practice efficiency.

Arthritis & Rheumatism Associates, P.C. (ARA) knows this balancing act well. In fact, it's a big reason why the 12-physician practice, spread out over four locations throughout greater Washington, D.C., maintains an in-house laboratory. Rather than sending tests to a commercial lab — and being limited to that lab's formulary and schedule — ARA has complete flexibility and control over the testing process. Ultimately this enhances patient

care, with a pleasant side effect: an in-house lab, run efficiently, can be a profit center for a practice.

Any number of conditions might lead a patient to ARA: pain in the muscles, bones or joints; fatigue; or an elevated total protein level showing up on a routine blood test. ARA physicians often rely on serum protein electrophoresis (SPE) to better understand how the patient's inflammatory system is working — and to rule out abnormalities that might signal illnesses such as vasculitis or multiple myeloma.

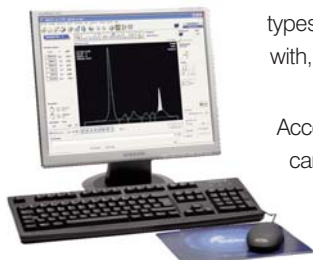
...doctors can order a test for immediate turnaround if needed.

For years, ARA performed SPE using a very hands-on, manual method. Its inefficiency became increasingly apparent as the practice grew.

"There's nothing we don't like about the HYDRASYS. It has worked really well for us."

— Vincent Calhoun, MLT (ASCP), General Supervisor

"We needed something more automated that would allow us to perform multiple tasks simultaneously," explains Robert Rosenberg, M.D., ARA's laboratory director. Not only were patient volumes increasing, but more types of tests were being done. The lab's two technologists had to be able to do SPE concurrently with, for example, enzyme immunoassay and immunofluorescent testing.



According to Jeannette Eaton, MT (ASCP), the lab's technical supervisor, the Sebia HYDRASYS[®] came highly recommended by industry peers. ARA reviewed this semi-automated electrophoresis system and implemented it in January 2007. Now its technologists can run SPE in less than half the time, while doing the work of a larger team.

The "walkaway" HYDRASYS rapidly performs all phases of electrophoresis — from sample application to migration to staining, destaining and drying — with minimal intervention from the technologist. There's no need to mix messy reagents; the user simply centrifuges the sample, adds a neat serum and loads the sample into the HYDRASYS. The instrument takes it from there.

"It's so simple — so nice to use," Eaton says. "Before, we had to make up the reagents and stain the gels manually. We had to handle acid, which was dangerous. With the HYDRASYS, there's no acid, no toxins involved. It's wonderful."



Customer Focus

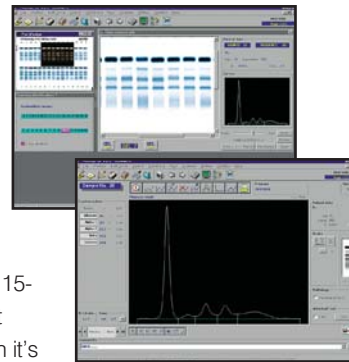
Eaton also likes not having to be chained to the instrument. "With our old system you really had to be Johnny-on-the-spot the minute the test was done," she explains. "The HYDRASYS gives you more leeway; you don't have to be right there waiting for it to finish. If you're in the middle of something else, the samples can sit there indefinitely without anything being ruined."



HYDRASYS: walk-away automation – electrophoresis simplified

Of course, the convenience of automation is secondary to test quality. The HYDRASYS tests positive on clarity and accuracy of results. "The gels work beautifully," Eaton reports. "In fact, when we scan them into the (Sebia) PHORESIS™ Imaging System, there are all sorts of options for editing to delimit peaks and sharpen curves — but we hardly ever need to use these capabilities. The scans always look so pretty and clear."

Dr. Rosenberg emphasizes that while the HYDRASYS results are "a little clearer and more defined" than the former manual method, it's the added value of speed and consistency that really makes the instrument worthwhile for this practice. "There are a lot of ways to do SPE," he explains, "and the old methods with the old gels were adequate in terms of accuracy and interpretation of results. But if you can do it faster, cleaner and more reliably, with fewer people, you're better off. With the Sebia instrument, we're able to maintain the highest quality control possible while running a highly efficient, lean operation that contributes positively to our bottom line."



Normally, ARA's technologists run SPE in batches two or three times a week using Sebia's 15-specimen HYDRAGEL® Protein assay. However, the beauty of having the HYDRASYS right there in house means doctors can order a test for immediate turnaround if needed. Though it's rare to have to order SPE on the spot, the semi-automated capability means technologists are now freed-up to handle emergency requests for other testing.

Should the lab need to add staff in the future, training should be a breeze, based on ARA's experience. Eaton recalls, "I had to miss Sebia's training due to a family emergency, but when I returned, my colleague was able to teach me how to run the instrument. I picked it up in about 5 minutes. It's almost foolproof—you really can't mess it up."

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Vincent Calhoun, MLT (ASCP), general supervisor of the lab, adds that the instrument itself has performed exceptionally well considering the workload it has to manage.

"(The HYDRASYS) is so simple – so nice to use."

— Jeannette Eaton, MT (ASCP), Technical Supervisor

"We've been running the HYDRASYS several times a week for two years and never had a single problem with it. The only time we've had it serviced was for preventative maintenance, which is an area Sebia does a good job of supporting."

"There's nothing we don't like about the HYDRASYS," Calhoun says. "It has worked really well for us."

ABOUT ARTHRITIS & RHEUMATISM ASSOCIATES

Arthritis & Rheumatism Associates, P.C. is the largest Rheumatology practice in the Washington, D.C. area and has served this community for more than 30 years. The practice is dedicated to the diagnosis and treatment of patients with disorders of the joints, muscles, tendons, and other connective tissue. ARA has treatment centers in Wheaton, Rockville and Chevy Chase, Maryland, and in Northwest Washington, DC. The practice features a full-service laboratory, x-ray facilities, a physical therapy division, three centers for the diagnosis and treatment of osteoporosis and three infusion centers. ARA also maintains an active clinical research program that participates in national trials to evaluate new medications for the treatment of arthritis, osteoporosis, and a variety of rheumatic diseases.

