

Editorial

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Recently, there was a full page petition in a local newspaper that spoke to the destruction of a garden space on the grounds of a hospital. Apparently the hospital administration had decided to destroy the garden in order to construct a new building. The bottom of the page had a list of over 145 signatures of people who were in opposition to this decision. The list included people who self identified themselves as full time physicians who headed major departments such as Pediatrics and Endocrinology, nurses, physician assistants, psychologists, nurse practitioners, social workers, librarians, health and life educators, and dietitians. Nowhere on the list was anyone who self identified themselves as medical laboratory scientists or technicians.

This leads one to wonder why. Perhaps no one from laboratory from medical director to phlebotomist knew there was a garden, never mind that it was going to be destroyed. Or perhaps everyone in the laboratory didn't like the garden in the first place. Or perhaps they just didn't know of fast changing news at their hospital.

Some time ago, a webpage was started to encourage support for the garden. Currently there are over 12,000 supporters and these include many patient families. The initial news concerning the status of the garden first started showing up on the webpage over three years ago. There have been at least six stories found in the local newspaper and the former mayor supported the need to keep the garden. This must have been mentioned in hospital newsletters, administratively generated letters to employees or something similar. It must have been overheard in the cafeteria or in the parking lots. So it could not have been overlooked.

Many people do not like to work in gardens or see them as meaningful but typically these are people who do not work with their hands. In conversation with ASCLS members for over four decades, there have been two common favorite hobbies – gardening and cooking. The garden itself could not have been overlooked, especially when the dissenters organized a day in the

garden for all employees.

So why is the laboratory staff so conspicuously not present? This is a tertiary care facility with a wide range of services and a heavy complement of research and clinical trial activity. The laboratory must be essential to the ability of the other providers to do their work but could it be that no one leading the effort to prevent the garden's loss thought to ask anyone from the laboratory? And if that is the reason, then why is that so. If the issue here is one of not being included, then logic forces one to ask why.

Is it because the healthcare providers do not see the laboratory staff as part of their care giving team? Is it because the laboratory staff do not see themselves as part of the care giving team? Is it a combination of both?

Over the years, this type of story has been repeated multiple times and in multiple cities across the country. Laboratory staff keep comforting themselves with the statement, "I don't care what people think of me (or call me) as long as the patient gets the best care." Isn't the psychological comfort of a quiet garden good patient care? Because if it is, the members of that hospital's laboratory staff should have signed the petition.

How can we stop this continual and continuing dismissal of the laboratory staff and its value? There must be a way. Now some folks might say that us old timers are out of touch with today's modern and fast paced laboratories so perhaps we should ask the younger professionals to show us all how to reach out of the laboratory to the hospital community and how to enter into meaningful dialogue on such topics as infection control, test utilization, the continuing education concerning newly available tests, workplace orientation for new employees of units other than the laboratory, and social activities that define the hospital's community. If we are supposed to be working for the good of the patient, then we need to improve the hospital as well as ourselves.