

Editorial

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At the beginning of every year, we all have the opportunity to look both ways – past and future – as the Roman god, Janus, can do. Recently, a gift allowed this Editor that opportunity in a rare and special way. The gift would warm the heart of any editor or historian – a copy of Volume 1, Number 1 of the official publication of the *American Society of Clinical Laboratory Technicians* published in November, 1934. While the initial instinct was to wait until an anniversary to speak about the past and the present, one item was simply too timely. In the second of a series of editorials from the editorial board, Dr Walter E King, a pathologist from Michigan stated, “It is now well recognized that the specialized training of the technician is of as much importance to the physician as is the professional training of the pharmacist who fills his prescriptions and that of the nurse who carries out his orders in the sick room and in the hospital ward. Proper recognition of the important work of the laboratory technicians, the standardization of courses of training for student technicians, and official licensure, definitely point to the position which this work is to occupy in medicine. Destiny has decreed that clinical laboratory technique shall become recognized as one of the true professional vocations”.

Well, it is now near to seventy years since those words were spoken. How far have we come in fulfilling destiny? True, we have standardized the courses and changed ‘training’ into ‘education’. For that we can look back to a long line of leaders such as John Conlin, Sarah McCarty, and Sister Alma LeDuc who were the first editors of the journal and Sara Marie Cicarelli during whose presidency we sued for freedom from the restriction of working only under the guidance of a pathologist, and Betty Murphy who was the first non-pathologist to chair an ASCP Committee – the Board of Registry for ASCP. We moved from training programs to college courses to undergraduate college degrees. We have initiated graduate programs that now lead to doctorates in the field. Some have begun to think that entry level into the profession should be at the master’s level. Others have compiled significant research examinations into the preparation and utilization of our profession. That is certainly worthy and commendable.

But what about recognition and licensure? Do we not keep complaining every day that no one knows who we are and that we are not valued? Obviously, simply doing our job day by day has not corrected the problem. This then begs the two next questions, “Why are we still doing what has been proven not to work in this regard”, followed by “Doing our job doesn’t bring respect, what will”? A third potential question is “Can we learn (and then do) what other professions done to gain respect and autonomy”?

Licensure has come about for many professions only when the professionals involved have taken a united stand. Legislatures simply will not enact such a restrictive law if the parties who will be covered by it cannot agree to its provisions. Every time a laboratorian testifies to things which need to be ‘changed’ or ‘modified’ in a bill, that gives the legislators reason to not support it. This does not mean that a bill cannot be made better. When the entire profession believes that a modification is in the best interest of the patient public or that the modification will provide a more clear and focused presentation, that shows a willingness to accept the responsibilities of a mature profession. It is when we concentrate on trifles that attempt to put ‘my’ spin as opposed to ‘your’ spin on it that causes the disinterest.

Legislators will also not enact a law for which it appears there is insufficient interest. When a licensure attempt is in process, it is critical to let legislators know that this attempt is important not just to the five or ten people that a specific legislator knows but that it is important to the entire state. That can only be done if they perceive interest from all over the state. How many of us have ever written to comment about a licensure bill or, for that matter, any bill which might impact on the clinical laboratory? How many of us can claim to be too busy with children, with relationships, with who-knows-what? We should acknowledge that we have caused the failure to pass state licensure laws in every state because we didn’t want it badly enough to work for it.

As to recognition, perhaps we should look to ourselves for the answer to this issue as well. Are we content to stay as the assistants of another profession or do we consider who we are worthy of autonomous acknowledgement? We claim to

be independent practitioners. Do we follow that claim by joining independent organizations that report to no one but ourselves? Do we support independent certification for ourselves and our successors? Dr King believed that this would be a natural progression. Have we met his expectations in this regard?

Many of us stay in the laboratory, not joining the greater facility community in any leadership roles. We offer few solutions to problems; we initiate no actions; and we present no information that could be valuable to others. True, doing these things will take time but the reward of acknowledgement from colleagues both in and out of the laboratory is significant on two levels. On the most personal level, recognition from one's peers is crucial to self growth. Recognition that you are a knowledgeable professional in your field will also elevate the status of the laboratory in your facility.

Each year, ASCLS and its constituent societies offer many different continuing education experiences. Besides the obvious—participating in one, there is the less obvious—presenting one yourself. Whether as a paper or poster or workshop, clinical laboratory professionals have a duty to educate their peers concerning the unusual aspects of laboratory medicine. Are we behaving as the professions we claim to be and that Dr King thought we were in 1934?

One other interesting thing about this predecessor journal – it was published bimonthly. We have recently opted to a quarterly journal because of the lack of appropriate and high quality articles. Is it because all that is important in our profession has been written? Is it because writing is so onerous that no one does it anymore? Or is it because we just hope that someone else will do the work for us?

As the noted twentieth century 'philosopher' Woody Allen, once said, "Success belongs to those who show up".

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