

Future Career Paths— Is it Time to Phase Out AS-CLT Programs?

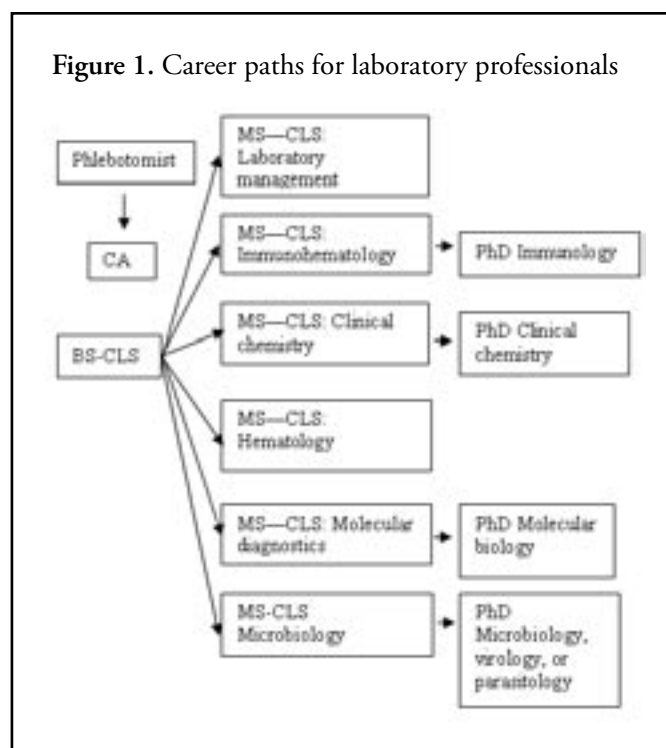
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In reviewing Dr Kathy Doig's editorial, "The Case for the Professional Doctorate in Clinical Laboratory Science (DCLS)", I agree with her statement that there is a high degree of overlap between the entry-level positions of a clinical laboratory technician (CLT) and a clinical laboratory scientist (CLS) in some facilities which may lead to dissatisfaction and a higher attrition for both. I also agree that the current career paths need to be revised. However, requiring a master's degree (MS) for entry-level or a clinical doctorate (DCLS) is not the solution to the problem. I do not believe there is a market for the DCLS. In addition to the clinical pathologists who are already providing consultations, recent advances in information technology allow physicians and other healthcare professionals access to information on ordering and interpreting laboratory tests.

It is time to consider phasing out the CLT. The addition of new content makes it difficult to adequately cover the required material in the 60 credits necessary for an associate degree. A bachelor's degree should be mandatory for entry-level positions, with phlebotomists and clinical assistants (CA) performing blood collection, waived testing, and appropriate tests at the clinical assistant level, according to standard operating procedures. In order to accommodate new content BS-CLS curricula need to be revised to eliminate coursework that is no longer necessary due to automation and other advances in laboratory science. CLT programs could be converted to either BS-CLS or Clinical Assistant Programs and certifying agencies could revise the CLT/MLT examinations and utilize them for certifying clinical assistants.

In addition to phasing out the CLT, we should consider eliminating the specialist certifications. With the exception of the SBB most specialist certifications are not recognized outside of the clinical laboratory, however an MS or PhD would receive the appropriate recognition. Clinical laboratory scientists who want to become a specialist in clinical practice, teach, or conduct research in a specific area would receive more recognition if they completed an MS, and in some cases a PhD, in the subject area. In the career paths

depicted in Figure 1, the master's degree would be in clinical laboratory science with multiple tracks. The same core subjects including research and design, statistical analysis, bioethics, management, and education (15 credits) would be required for all tracks. In addition to the core subjects, courses specific to the track would be required for the degree. Offering the MS-CLS by distance delivery would allow generalists the opportunity to specialize in their area of interest while remaining in the workforce and would reduce the number of faculty needed if only a limited number of colleges offered the program.



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