

NCA and BOR Consider New Credentialing Agency

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The National Credentialing Agency for Laboratory Personnel, Inc. (NCA) and the Board of Registry (BOR) of the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) may unite to form a new credentialing agency. Patricia Ellinger, MSED, Chair of the BOR Board of Governors, and Kathryn Doig, PhD, President of the NCA Board of Directors jointly announced the effort at the ASCLS Clinical Laboratory Educators' Conference, March 2, 2006 in San Antonio. By invitation, E. Blair Holladay, PhD, BOR Executive Director, addressed the NCA board at its regular meeting, November 4, 2005, leading to the development of a letter of intent signed December 12 at BOR headquarters by Drs Doig and Holladay and Ms Ellinger and by BOR Vice-chair Cynthia Johns and NCA Executive Director Sheila O'Neal. The non-binding letter opens the opportunity for consideration of a new agency.

NCA was chartered in 1978 as a peer-review credentialing agency in response to concerns for pathologists' control of the clinical laboratory science (CLS) profession and has functioned as an independent agency sponsored by the American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science (ASCLS) and the Association of Genetic Technologists. Generalist certifications through NCA lead to the Clinical Laboratory Scientist [CLS (NCA)] and Clinical Laboratory Technician [CLT (NCA)] credentials. The BOR is an agency of ASCP and BOR generalist certifications are Medical Technologist [MT (ASCP)] and Medical Laboratory Technician [MLT (ASCP)]. There were 976 BOR MT examinees in the first half of 2005; NCA examined 521 CLS candidates in all of 2005.

Conference attendees voiced enthusiastic approval. Concern for clinical pathologists' constraint of clinical laboratory scientists' practice has moderated in the years since ASCP became independent from the College of American Pathologists and

as the CLS profession has grown in numbers, representation, and stature. The existence of parallel, competing agencies creates confusion among employers and graduates, consumes resources, and weakens our profession's public voice. Unity would establish consistent standards for professional entry, reduce confusion, and enhance our influence on state licensure laws, federal regulations, and employment standards. It would assemble our talented professionals serving both agencies to strengthen credentialing activities, and enhance the financial security of both agencies, which has held steady but not grown during the recent dip in certificant numbers.

What unification issues face us? The technical issues include, but are not limited to...

- What form do the new exams take?
- What exam delivery agency do we employ?
- How do we resolve tax status differences?
- What does a new agency mean for present credential-holders?
- How do we resolve differences in certification maintenance programs?
- How does the new agency blend the various specialty and certificant credentials and exams?

Perhaps more important, we must address credential name, the makeup of the agency board, and autonomy.

What name do we want? Medical Technologist? Clinical Laboratory Scientist? Medical Laboratory Scientist? The internationally recognized title, Biomedical Scientist? What does a new credential name mean to employers, state licensing boards, and federal agencies that regulate laboratories? What about federal and state agencies that provide funding and that currently recognize the terms CLS and MT? Do current certificants change their credential name? What name would be best recognized and respected by the public?

How would the new board look? What constitutes peer leadership and review? How many pathologists should be included, how many clinical laboratory scientists? Should it be chaired by a clinical laboratory scientist? A clinical pathologist? Who gets to vote, who serves as an advisor?

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DIALOGUE AND DISCUSSION

And finally, to whom would the new agency report? ASCP? ASCLS? Perhaps the best approach, expressed at the educators' meeting by Lucy J. Randles, MA, CLS is the "NAACLS model". The National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences, which audits and accredits clinical laboratory science schools throughout the world, is an independent agency supported in part from dues paid by member organizations. The NAACLS board includes representatives from its member organizations and the profession's constituency. An independent credentialing agency like NAACLS would be responsive to, and best represent, the needs of the profession.

We've got insightful, cautious leaders willing to hammer out the details for the new agency, and we know the answers will not appear overnight. The decisions we make have serious implications for the future of our profession, and your input will help. Please send questions and suggestions to Sheila O'Neal or Kathy Doig at nca-info@goamp.com and to Pat Ellinger, Cindy Johns, or Blair Holladay at BORNCA@ascp.org. We've got an opportunity to contribute to the future of our profession.

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