

Practical Solutions for Shortages in the Clinical Laboratory Professional Work Force

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ABSTRACT

Laboratory professionals are vital to the efficient function in the health care system, and the continued loss of qualified technologists has considerable impact.

During the past decade, experienced professionals who have been in the field for many years are now retiring or planning to retire in the next few years, leaving positions open with an exponential growth in job vacancies. Qualified applicants with the necessary certification, education, and skills to fill these positions are becoming hard to find.

Because of population growth, demand for laboratory services requires technological advancements and training of the existing staff, which can be time-consuming and tedious work in an already-understaffed setting. To compensate for the loss of experienced laboratory scientists, laboratory automation accelerated testing has been introduced.

Currently, the volume of certified medical laboratory science (MLS) and medical laboratory technology (MLT) professionals does not meet the demand for laboratory professionals. The lack of visibility for this profession and salaries that are not comparable with the education level of other health care fields hamper the recruitment of students into MLT and MLS programs and the capability to retain laboratory professionals. With changes in health care and decreased reimbursement for laboratory tests, higher salaries for laboratory personnel are not likely to occur.¹

Filling the clinical laboratory scientist vacancies first starts at the education level. To recruit qualified technologists and subsequently retain them once in the workforce, higher-education institutions should increase awareness of their American Society for Clinical Pathology board-accredited programs, which will—as a result—not only provide more qualified applicants who are able to fill these vacancies but will also ensure accessibility to higher salaries and job advancement.

Increasing awareness is the key to address these issues of vacancy. Retention of certified laboratory professionals and training to adapt to the changes in technological advancements need to be emphasized in the practice of clinical laboratory science.

The field also needs to improve the visibility of the profession in early educational processes in collaboration with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics programs; promote recognition; and showcase the medical laboratory profession as a vital and promising health care career with many opportunities. Once this awareness is achieved, vacancies in the clinical laboratory science field will begin to decline.

ABBREVIATIONS: MLS - medical laboratory science, MLT - medical laboratory technology.

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