

In Praise of Reading

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In this day of rapidly changing forms of communication, it has become commonplace to question the role of specialty journals, the future of print media, and the existence of libraries. Many claim that the Web will eliminate all of these and that each of us will access information electronically when and if we need it. Within these discussions you will find many pieces of supportive evidence—indeed the slowness of publication within scientific and professional journals seems out of sync with the pace of the world, the ease of access to electronic material does suggest that killing trees and mailing paper to people is inefficient, and, of course, why would you need to go to a library if one existed in virtual form in your own home.

But, on the opposing side, there are equal and perhaps superior pieces of evidence to support not only the continuation but also the increased need for journals, books, and libraries. While it is true that publication in a scientific or professional journal takes an extended period of time, with some journals taking pride in the fact that they have two or more years wait between submission and final publication, it is also true that the review and examination of data that occurs is essential for truthfulness and credibility.

Professions cannot allow their members to continue to practice with out of date information or theories. Science and the professions cannot afford to allow unreviewed information to spread through cyberspace. The potential harmful impact to the public is too great. Imagine what would happen if a civil engineer chose to build a bridge using 19th century techniques or materials, or a computer engineer still thought that centrally controlled mainframe computers were the way for people to access computing.

Knowledge moves forward in erratic leaps and reversals. How would practitioners know of the controversies of the day without journals to provide data presentation and rebuttal? It is the hallmark of every professional group to have journals in which ideas can be debated, defeated, modified, or accepted. Without them, we would

spread rumor rather than fact. Without them, the importance of hand washing, the success of vaccines, and the structure of DNA, to mention just three, would have been the province of the few and their benefits lost to the many.

Print media too may seem in jeopardy. Why spend all that money for a book when you can download it? For those who love the feel of a book in their hands, this may be blasphemy. Besides that affective sense, books support the permanence of knowledge, the importance of history. If it were not for the print media, we would not know that DaVinci invented a helicopter four hundred years before Sikorsky or that Gregor Mendel elucidated the basic rules of genetics sixty years before they became known to the general scientific community.

And libraries? Wouldn't we all wish to have libraries at home? I suspect that most of us do have home libraries but home libraries do not reflect the richness and diversity of life. They may reflect our own likes or perhaps contain material for our children's schooling but where would be those treasured and unanticipated joys that we find while wandering through the stacks? Our own personal growth is dependent on acquiring the unusual, the intriguing, and the novel. How narrow would our lives be without the unexpected?

One of the first things that most scientific or professional associations do is to create a journal to provide the essentials of learning to their members. The next is to have libraries subscribe to it and, from them, to the many database services worldwide. Indeed, most professions use their journal as a marker of the professionalism of their members. In every sense of the word, a literate membership is professional, is current, and is aware of the larger community in which it exists.

For over 65 years, through many name changes of the organization and its journal, ASCLS's philosophies have remained firm: to provide high quality clinical laboratory science to the patient public. *Clinical Laboratory Science* does this by supporting a literate profession. By reaching out with new knowledge, clarifying and applying knowledge to unique situations, reviewing and validating theories and processes, the journal enlarges perception with information about science, professional issues, and our place in the U.S. healthcare delivery system.

This goal can only be attained by the support of the membership who, through their own manuscript submissions, become contributors
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professional groups to encourage the FDA to incorporate the more stringent waived test criteria into the home use approval mechanism so that all waived tests would meet the *same* standards of accuracy and precision.

HOW ARE WAIVED LABORATORIES PERFORMING?

Those who attended the ASCLS Legislative Symposium in March 2001 heard Judy Yost, Director, Division of Laboratories and Acute Care Centers of CMS report on a small study of 100 waived laboratories in two states. Results indicated that many of them were not using the test kits appropriately and not following the manufacturers' instructions for correct performance of the tests. 50% of those laboratories had quality problems.

Last month at the Lab Institute Conference in Washington, D.C., Ms Yost updated that report with additional findings. The survey has been expanded to include a 2.5% sample of waived laboratories in eight additional states.

- 32% of these laboratories did not perform quality control as required
- 32% failed to have manufacturers' instructions
- 16% failed to follow manufacturers' instructions
- 23% had certificate issues (testing beyond the scope of their certificate)
- 20% cut occult blood cards or urine dipsticks to save money
- 19% had personnel who were neither trained nor evaluated

A total of 48% of the laboratories in this second group had some type of quality problems.

Both the Office of Inspector General (OIG) and CMS have waived laboratory surveillance in their work plans for the coming year. CMS plans to take an educational approach and survey a percentage of waived laboratories annually.

ASCLS has long been an advocate for the patients we serve and their right to accurate laboratory results. We are supportive of the efforts of CMS to ensure that the patients who receive laboratory services from waived laboratories can be confident that they are getting quality laboratory service.

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to the profession and science. The word, contributors, means much more than "just writing". It conveys a belonging to a tradition of teaching and learning. It means participating in the most fundamental way to the community of scientists and professionals that has existed through millennia. Many reading this might say that they could not be on a par with the giants of the past; that they simply could not write anything that earth shaking. Perhaps. But equally important to the landmark leaps of knowledge is the continuous assessment of current knowledge. Did that instrument work in an unusual situation? Was that an interesting infectious disease presentation? Why did those cells react in that fashion? How can we better communicate our knowledge to others in our facilities? What is the impact of stresses and strains from external forces on our practice field? Each of these questions needs to be answered on a daily basis in our practice. Each of them also needs to be disseminated to colleagues to help them provide better patient care. In this interconnected world, we are responsible to teach and learn. For a profession, the vehicle of that enterprise is the journal.

As we have all known in our personal and professional lives, change is the only constant. The Editor-in-Chief of *Clinical Laboratory Science* for the past five years, Marian Schwabbauer, has stepped down from this position. Marian has served ASCLS in many different capacities throughout the years and her tenure on the Editorial Board has been greatly appreciated. During these past years, we have changed editorial offices—the people who actually publish the journals—three times. That she managed to maintain a consistent flow of manuscript handling and publications was no easy task, especially in light of the loss of significant numbers of manuscripts by one of the offices.

It will be no easy task to take over from her. She made the process less cumbersome and less intimidating by improving the overall infrastructure. Thank you, Marian, from all of us.

Susan J Leclair is 2001-2003 *Clinical Laboratory Science* Editor-in-Chief.