

## TEXAS ASSOCIATION FOR CLINICAL LABORATORY SCIENCE

(<http://www.tacls.org>)

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### CRITICAL ISSUE: SHORTAGE OF QUALIFIED CLINICAL LABORATORY PROFESSIONALS

#### FACT CONCERNING THE CLINICAL LABORATORIES AND LABORATORY PERSONNEL

1. Clinical Laboratory Professionals are responsible for performing laboratory tests that provide over 70% of the information for medical-decision making. These tests provide information for:
  - Identification of tumor markers, prostate cancer (prostate specific antigen or PSA), leukemias, sexually transmitted diseases and other related diseases.
  - Diagnosis of diabetes, heart disease, liver disease, or nutritional deficiencies.
  - Identification of microbial infections and specific antibiotics used for treatment.
  - Diagnosis of anemias and bleeding disorders.
  - Collection, processing and transfusion of blood and blood components.
  - Matching of organs for transplant.
2. While automation has increased the capacity of many laboratories, additional genetic and molecular procedures have increased the complexity of many procedures.
3. The number of clinical laboratory science programs throughout the country continues to decline
  - There are two levels of educational programs – Clinical Laboratory Science/Medical Technologist (CLS/MT) baccalaureate degree programs and Clinical (Medical) Laboratory Technician (CLT/MLT) associate degree programs.
  - CLS/MT are responsible for the management, supervision and performance of complex level testing – CLT/MLTs work under the supervision of the CLS and perform many routine medical laboratory tests.
  - Last year 22% of the educational programs closed .
  - The number of CLS/MT programs has gone from a high in 1970 of 791 programs to 240 programs in 2002.
4. The number of graduates from programs continues to decline.
  - In 1977 there were 6,519 CLS/MT graduates and in 2001 there were 2,061 graduates.
  - In 1985 there were 3,165 CLT/MLT graduates and in 2001 there were 2000 CLT/MLT graduates.
  - Shortages in the medical laboratories continues to increase.
    - The current vacancy rate is 12-20% throughout the country.
    - The National Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a need of 12,000/year of laboratory professionals through 2010.
5. While most hospitals and clinics in Texas hire appropriately educated and certified laboratory professionals, the Texas Association for Clinical Laboratory Science is concerned about the possibility of hospitals beginning to hire non-certified workers in response to the shortage. When this occurs, we are concerned about public safety and quality health care.

#### SOLUTIONS TO THESE PROBLEMS

- Legislation addressing the shortage of health care professionals needs to include not only nurses and physicians, but also clinical laboratory professionals
- Legislation addressing scholarships and funding for health care professionals needs to include clinical laboratory students and programs
- A mechanism needs to be established in the State of Texas to evaluate
  - the number of current clinical laboratory positions
  - the current vacancy rate
  - future trends in employment
- A mechanism to evaluate the quality of laboratory testing and correlation with credentials and certification
- A mechanism to assure laboratory tests are only performed by appropriately educated and certified personnel.