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Clinical Laboratory News (ISSN 0161-9640) is the authoritative source for timely analysis of issues and trends affecting clinical laboratories, clinical laboratorians, and the practice of clinical laboratory science.



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

# Promoting the Laboratorian's Contribution to Health Care

**T**he beginning of a new year is a time for self-reflection and goal setting. From a professional standpoint, it is an excellent time to reflect upon the vital role that laboratorians play in health care today. It is important that we take personal pride in the significant role the clinical laboratory plays in the diagnosis and treatment of patients.

At the same time, however, it seems appropriate to reflect on the curious conundrum the clinical laboratory represents in health care. Laboratory reports are very important in patient care, but the role of the people in the laboratory who produce the reports tends to be obscured in the physician-patient relationship. The physician utilizes the product of the clinical laboratory during the process of disease evaluation, diagnosis, and management of the patient. However, when a patient experiences the happiness of a positive outcome, the event is shared only between the patient and the treating physician. At that moment, when diagnostic or treatment success is achieved, few patients would think of the role a laboratorian played in producing the report and the associated interpretation the physician used to make the diagnosis or to decide upon the course of treatment.

Why do I call this to your attention? I believe this concept, that our professional activities tend to be minimized and undervalued in the overall process of health care delivery, is the fundamental reason why the clinical laboratory tends to experience an inequitable share of the ongoing belt-tightening in health care. In today's environment, the laboratory seems to be the first to experience budget cuts and the first in line for reimbursement cuts, but it is typically the last in line for institutional space and resources.

Am I overstating the case? Probably. But



Thomas P. Moyer, PhD  
2004 AACC President

it is important that the professionals providing laboratory services, whether we be associated with the hospital laboratory, the outpatient laboratory, the reference laboratory, or with the in vitro diagnostics industry that produced the technology, come to grips with this realization and begin to take a proactive approach to educating the public about the value of our profession to health care. We must promote the value of clinical laboratory testing and minimize the perception that laboratory reports are a commodity provided by the lowest bidder.

Not only is this message fundamentally important to those already in our profession, but it is also critical to attract more young people into clinical laboratory professions. Moreover, for the long-term vigor of the profession, a fair share in health care reimbursement is essential to ensure that the laboratory can continue to deliver high-quality reports and to fund development of new services focused on future improvements to health care outcomes.

As a profession, we have good reason to take great pride in the role we play in health care today. But clearly, we need to project that pride more publicly. Our profession must continuously articulate the message that clinical laboratories make a very significant contribution to health care.

What steps can you take today to more publicly promote our profession? One simple way is to promote Lab Tests Online ([www.labtestsonline.org](http://www.labtestsonline.org)), a Web site conceived and maintained by people from all facets of our profession. This award-winning site has been identified by numerous major news media as an excellent source of consumer health information and recently received the Summit Award for excellence in consumer education from the American Society of Association Executives. The site exists thanks to the partnership among many laboratory associations, ACLA, ASCLS, ASH, ASM, ASCP, CAP, CLAS, CLMA, CSCC, CSMLS, NACB, and NCCLS, with AACC spearheading the group. Be sure to tell your family, neighbors, and community about this excellent source of information on lab tests. Not only will it empower them to take more responsibility for their own health care, but at the same time, you will help to promote the value of our profession. I extend my special thanks to the visionary industry leaders who helped launch this site and to the site sponsors who make this public health education venture possible.

As we enter 2004, please join me in making a New Year's resolution to let others know about the role of laboratory professionals in providing quality health care. How can you act on this resolution? Here's a suggestion. Next time you go to a medical conference, sit beside a clinician, and at a moment in the conference when lab results are mentioned, turn to that person and say, "It's the laboratory!"

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