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The BC Society of Laboratory Science asks, “Do British Columbians deserve less?”

Following yesterday’s release of the Report of the Cameron Commission of Inquiry into laboratory testing errors in Newfoundland, the BC Society of Laboratory Science [BCSLS] urges governments across Canada to implement measures that will protect patient safety and restore confidence in medical laboratory testing nationwide. This includes acting on the recommendations of the Cameron Inquiry in Newfoundland and the Miramichi Inquiry in New Brunswick and immediately establishing a Regulatory College for Medical Laboratory Professionals here in British Columbia.

Medical Laboratory Technologists [MLTs] are currently regulated and licensed in every province in Canada with the exception of Newfoundland, PEI and British Columbia. If the recommendations of the Cameron Inquiry are implemented in Newfoundland, and if PEI likely follows suit, then BC would be the only province in the country that does not regulate medical laboratory technologists. The BCSLS feels that this is unacceptable as it poses a threat to patient safety.

According to Tanya Kilborn, President of the BCSLS, “since up to 85% of decisions about patient diagnosis and treatment are based on medical laboratory tests, the patient and their health care providers must always have confidence in the accuracy of these test results. As medical laboratory professionals, we remain committed to our number one priority—ensuring patient safety through accurate medical laboratory testing. To that end we embrace the recommendations of the Cameron Inquiry and encourage their timely implementation, both in Newfoundland and as appropriate, here in British Columbia.”

The BCSLS is the voluntary Professional Association representing over 1,400 Medical Laboratory Professionals across BC. The Society has been a proponent of regulation of the profession for over a decade and has made several attempts to convince the BC Ministry of Health to designate a Regulatory College for Medical Laboratory Professionals under the Health Professions Act. The latest attempt was a comprehensive proposal delivered to the Ministry in July of 2007.

This proposal favoured a joint Regulatory College in partnership with the BC Association of Medical Radiation Technologists. To date the BC Ministry of Health has chosen not to act.

According to Malcolm Ashford, Executive Director of the BCSLS, “regulatory bodies (Regulatory Colleges) protect the public by ensuring that medical laboratory technologists are competent to practise safely and effectively. They establish codes of ethics, determine scope of practice, enforce requirements for continuing competence and provide a public complaints/disciplinary process. We [BCSLS] also recommend regulation of medical laboratory assistants. MLAs perform important pre-analytical functions including taking blood

(phlebotomy), and labelling and transporting specimens. Medical literature indicates that most laboratory errors occur in the pre-analytical phase of testing. Currently, MLAs are not a regulated health profession in any Canadian province/territory. We believe that regulation of MLTs and MLAs is essential to protect patient safety.”

Medical laboratories in BC, both public and private, are subject to the BC Diagnostic Accreditation Program [DAP]. The DAP accreditation, however, does not credential the human resource aspect of the laboratory. The DAP recommends, in a best case scenario, that Medical Laboratory Technologists are certified by the Canadian Society of Medical Laboratory Science [CSMLS] but this is not mandatory by legislation. A Regulatory College would do that.

Ashford continued, “if we are to do everything in our power to ensure patient safety and public protection in BC, then we must look to the regulation and licensing of Medical Laboratory Professionals as well as totally embracing the Diagnostic Accreditation Program. That way we know that all aspects of laboratory operations are meeting the highest standards possible. We urge the BC government to move forward on establishing a regulatory college for medical laboratory technologists. The people of British Columbia have the right to expect their laboratory tests will be performed by qualified medical laboratory technologists. They deserve nothing less.”

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Note: The response from the CSMLS to the Report of the Cameron Commission of Inquiry can be found on their website at www.csmls.org

The **Cameron Commission of Inquiry on Hormone Receptor Testing** in Newfoundland can be searched on the web at www.cihrt.nl.ca