



BCSLS Statement

Laboratory Services Review & Reform in 2003

October 2003

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BCSLS - BC's professional association of medical laboratory technologists and medical laboratory assistants

BCSLS is a provincial professional association of medical laboratory technologists and assistants. We estimate the total BC laboratory workforce of MLTs and MLAs to be 4,800. Our members work in the private and public sectors and we recognize the different strengths and contribution of both delivery systems to good patient care.

BCSLS made a submission to the Ministry of Health Planning in May 2002 on the *Future of BC's Diagnostic Laboratory System* (attached) and a BCSLS representative participated in the June 2002 Stakeholder workshop. BCSLS also participates on a Ministry of Health Planning advisory committee on health human resources.

The board of BCSLS has been carefully following the Ministries of Health/Health Planning initiatives to review and re-organize the delivery of laboratory services. BCSLS is concerned about recent changes in delivery of laboratory services. These changes will have a significant impact on patient care and most appear to be taking place in a random fashion without an integrated approach.

The goal of the medical laboratory is to contribute to effective patient-centred care and support other members of the health care team. We believe it is essential laboratory services be delivered by a system which

- supports clinical education for students. Practicum placements for technologists and assistants are now scarce – limiting the numbers of students being trained to replace the aging workforce.
- stresses the importance of Quality Control. Sophisticated instruments produce reliable data only if the inputs are valid and the outputs are regularly checked against controls.
- uses appropriately trained individuals in an accredited facilities

BCSLS is particularly concerned with two pressing issues:

1. Human Resources: regional health authorities are proceeding with significant changes to staffing and services on a region by region basis without reference to a provincial plan. These staffing changes occur at a time when reduced clinical placements have already cut the number of students being trained AND other provinces are actively recruiting medical laboratory professionals in BC.

2. Public statements on “automation”:

Our field changes rapidly and many advances have been made in the automation of certain laboratory tests. Many tests can be conducted with “robotics; many others cannot. Automation will not magically transform the delivery of laboratory services in BC.

The management of change in the medical laboratory service is complicated by several factors. This is a high volume service with tests which provide the basis for a significant number of other health care services. The reliability of tests depends upon adherence to routines, standard operating procedures, protocols, maintenance and backup. The laboratory, more than most health care services, needs a long term view of proposed changes.

BCSLS urges our members to continue to practice responsibly in these challenging times of change. Be ever mindful of our professional obligations contained in the Code of Professional Conduct developed by our national association.

As a professional medical laboratory technologist or assistant, you should

- have a clear understanding of your current skill set and seek documented training and relevant procedures when asked to stretch the boundaries of your competencies.
- make sure all duties are properly documented and controlled and lines of supervision are clearly established in the medical laboratory.
- constructively express your concerns about duty changes, procedures and quality assurance to Laboratory Managers and the Laboratory’s Medical Director.