



## **Growing Crisis in the Clinical Laboratory Workforce**

### **Position**

To ensure access to quality health care services the healthcare system must have an adequate supply of clinical laboratory personnel. Today that supply is in serious question. This shortage hampers the ability of clinical laboratories to meet patient testing demands, posing problems for patient health and welfare. Growing numbers of patients and the number and complexity of medical laboratory tests are putting strains on a profession growing modestly.

We call upon Congress to address this concern within the Veterans Health Administration and to begin to address the concern throughout our nation's health care system.

Congress must do the following:

- ✓ Enhance recruitment and retention efforts within the Veterans Health Administration
- ✓ Authorize and appropriate funding for a program to within the Public Health Service Act to ensure training for citizens seeking to enter the clinical laboratory workforce
- ✓ Authorize the Government Accountability Organization (GAO) to study the shortage of clinical laboratory personnel and make recommendations to Congress

### **Rationale**

The Bureau of Labor statistics anticipates needed growth of 12,000 new medical laboratory professionals per year to meet growing demand. However, academic programs currently produce just 5,000 graduates per year.

Another cause for concern is the average age of the laboratory workforce, which has been increasing steadily. In 2004, the average age of a certified medical technologist was 43.7 (which was slightly older than of nurses (43.3) and is aging at a 78 percent faster rate than the entire U.S. labor market.

On September 28, 2016, the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted its third determination of VHA occupations with the largest staffing shortages as required by Section 301 of the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014. They determined that the largest critical need occupations were Medical Officer, Nurse, Psychologist, Physician Assistant, Physical Therapist, and Medical Technologist (clinical laboratory personnel).

This crisis is the result of a decades-long decline in MLS and MLT producing academic programs. From 1970 the number of accredited programs declined from nearly 1,000 to less than 450 in 2006. Since 2008, the number of programs has rebounded modestly from 427 to 479 in 2015. That increase has not been nearly enough to address the increasing demand. Further the shortage exacerbates the challenge in securing clinical sites for training.

## **Background**

Clinical laboratory personnel are critical to our nation's health care. They provide a wide-range of diagnostic, technical, therapeutic and direct patient care and support services. These professionals are critical to physicians and nurses with whom they work and to the patients they serve. In total, clinical laboratory personnel and other allied health professions account for an estimated 60 percent of the entire health care workforce.

More than 4 billion medical laboratory tests are performed each year in the United States, the single highest volume medical activity. Approximately 70% of physicians' patient interactions are influenced by laboratory test data.

New laboratory tests are being developed all the time to improve early detection and diagnosis of diseases, more accurately monitor conditions and better protect outcomes (prognosis). One area of significant growth, molecular diagnostics detects and measures the presence of genetic material or proteins associated with a specific health condition or disease, helping to uncover the underlying mechanisms of disease and enabling clinicians to take care at an individual level, facilitating the practice of "personalized medicine."

<b>On Behalf of ASCLS</b> Patrick Cooney (202) 347-0034 x101 Patrick@federalgrp.com	<b>On Behalf of CLMA</b> Mary Jo Bonifas (Iowa) mjobonifas@gmail.com  Carol Collingsworth (Iowa) carol.collingsworth@unitypoint.org  Paul Keoppel (Utah) pkeoppel@gmail.com
<b>On Behalf of AMT</b> Michael McCarty Office: 202.243.7842   Mobile: 703.727.3776 michael@mccarty-legal.com	
<b>On Behalf of ASCP</b> Matthew Schultz (202)347-4450 ext. 2905 Matthew.Schulze@ascp.org	