

Medical Laboratory Technicians in California: Expanding Hospital Lab Capacity

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Abstract

UCSF researchers find that Medical Laboratory Technicians (MLTs) are being integrated into laboratory staff at California hospitals with good results. This one-page document provides a summary of the full report (available at <http://futurehealth.ucsf.edu>) and offers recommendations for more fully tapping MLT potential.

Findings

- More MLTs could work in California to complement the work of Clinical Laboratory Scientists (CLSs)
 - MLTs perform moderately complex testing
 - The employment of MLTs in hospital laboratories allows CLSs to focus on complex testing
- Drivers facilitating the integration of MLTs into lab staff include:
 - An aging and contracting CLS workforce
 - Automated laboratory equipment
 - Positive experiences by laboratory directors & hospitals that have hired MLTs
- Benefits of integrating MLTs into lab staff include:
 - Opportunities to control labor costs while maintaining quality and meeting demand
 - MLT wages average 70-80% of those of CLSs
 - Clinical internship time for MLTs is ½ that of CLSs
 - MLT provides a career step between lab assistant and CLS
 - Mentoring MLT students keeps CLS skills fresh
- Challenges to fuller integration of MLTs into lab staff include:
 - Concern from CLSs
 - Limited pre-licensure MLT education programs and clinical internship opportunities
 - The costs of running clinical internship programs

Recommendations

- Share best practices and information about MLTs with hospital and lab administration
- Educate and inform policy makers about the emerging MLT profession and its role
- Develop and disseminate clear guidance on CA legal scopes of practice for MLTs and CLSs
- Encourage and support clinical internships for MLTs at CA hospitals
- Encourage pilot programs that use MLTs in hospital labs
- Distribute guides on the role of automated lab equipment in workflow redesign
- Develop MLT educational programs that produce well-prepared graduates with:
 - Contemporary curricula that cover lab skills as well as team training
 - Appropriate geographic distribution of programs
 - Partnerships between employers and community colleges
- Develop career ladders for laboratory staff for progression from lab assistant to MLT to CLS.
- Support research and cost/benefit analyses of sites that have integrated MLTs onto staff.

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