



## Laboratory Legislative Symposium 2012

Submitted by: Cindy Johnson

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The annual Legislative Symposium hosted by the American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science (ASCLS), the Clinical Laboratory Management Association (CLMA), the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) and the American Medical Technologists (AMT) was held in Washington, DC on March 19-20. Laboratory professionals and leaders from these four laboratory professional organizations came to bring the laboratory community's legislative agenda to Congress. There were 149 attendees representing 36 states that participated in this two-day event. It appeared from the show of hands that approximately 50% of the participants were first time attendees; many of them were students from various laboratory programs.

On day one of the symposium, leaders and legislative experts from the laboratory professional organizations provided education on the issues affecting clinical laboratories. Through various activities, attendees learned about the current political climate and how health care reform continues to impact the clinical laboratory. In addition, Judy Yost, CMS CLIA Director for the Division of Laboratory Services, provided an overview of statistics as they relate to the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Act program new quality control guidelines. The experts then offered tools on how to successfully present the current issues to our respective congressional members and their legislative assistants on Capitol Hill.

We converged on Capitol Hill on

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### **Mission Statement**

As part of CentraCARE Health System, We are a **TEAM** of dedicated health care professionals whose mission is to provide quality service, expert consultation and comprehensive medical laboratory information to Central Minnesota.

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day two of the symposium. The six members of Minnesota Laboratory Delegation (pictured) visited with legislative assistants from the offices of Senators Klobuchar and Franken as well as our respective House of Representative members. We had the opportunity to share with the legislative assistants what we do every single day to impact the care our patients. We stressed the value of the laboratory even though we are usually the silent partner on the healthcare team. We play a vital role in providing the foundation for the diagnosis and management of many conditions. This opening statement about our role was an easy mechanism to invite conversation and ease into our main talking points.

*Following is a brief summary of the main issues we discussed during the "Hill" visits:*

### **The Medical Laboratory Personnel Shortage**

The U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that there will be almost 11,000 laboratory technologist/technician job openings annually through 2018. Unfortunately, the programs preparing tomorrow's laboratory workforce educate only about a third of what is needed. Fewer than 5,000 individuals are graduating each year from accredited

education/training programs.

We were seeking congressional support to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in 2012 and to maintain Department of Labor (DOL) workforce funding levels in order to sustain the health related workforce programs. Allocated funds from the WIA have provided or supplemented grants for existing and emerging medical laboratory education programs. We discussed the impact grant funds have had on the state of Minnesota. We need to all be very proud that Minnesota is looked to as a leader in growing Medical Laboratory Science and Medical Laboratory Technician programs through grant funds such as those from the Department of Labor. These funds have been put to good use in our state and we want to make sure that such opportunities exist for other states in the country to assist with the workforce shortage.

### **Laboratory Reimbursement Cuts**

While less than two percent of all Medicare spending, clinical laboratory testing has been subject to significant freezes in payments and cuts over the last two decades. Medicare payment amounts for clinical laboratory services have been reduced by about 40 percent in real (inflation adjusted) terms over the past 20 years.

Clinical laboratories have suffered deep cuts as a result of health reform. The law includes a direct and immediate cut to the Part B Clinical Lab Fee Schedule of 1.75 percent each year from 2011 through 2015. This nine percent cumulative cut is the largest cut among all Part B providers. Clinical laboratories also received another cut through the productivity adjustment—one of only a few providers subject to an immediate adjustment in 2011—resulting in an additional 11 percent cut over ten years. Together, the direct cut and the productivity adjustment result in a cumulative 20 percent cut over ten years. Laboratories are also facing up to a 2 percent cut to the fee schedule as a result of sequestration, which begins in January, 2013. Sequestration will occur unless Congress passes other methods to address the budget deficit.

Our message was that it is essential that Congress recognize that we cannot continue the quality care for which laboratory professionals are renowned without the appropriate level of reimbursement.

### **Modernizing the Clinical Diagnostic Laboratory Fee Schedule**

The Medicare program reimburses clinical diagnostic laboratory tests according to

the fee schedule that has not been subject to a fundamental review since it was established in 1984. In its current state, the laboratory fee schedule does not reflect the advancements in technology and safety seen in the laboratory over the past twenty-five years. We are seeking legislation to modernize the laboratory fee schedule that could be accomplished through a negotiated rule-making process.

### Our Take Away

Our experiences have helped us realize that we have already made an impact. All of our Minnesota legislative personnel were familiar with the vital role the laboratory plays in patient care and were receptive to our message. To

preserve momentum, it is our responsibility as a laboratory community to keep this line of communication open to our congressional leaders as it is an invaluable tool for change. It is important to continue to be the face of the laboratory

not only when we are called to action but in our daily interactions. We have the opportunity to ensure that everyone who interacts with us understands who we are and what we do.



Front row: Deb Rodahl, Heather Schmitz, Jean Bauer, Cindy Johnson  
Back row: Rick Panning, Rod Forsman

## CentraCare Laboratory Services Now Performs Vitamin D, 25-OH

By: Jerome Schlabsz

As of March 20, CentraCare Laboratory Services began performing total Vitamin D (D2, D3) testing at CCLS - River Campus. This assay replaces the testing that was previously sent to Mayo Medical Laboratories.

Vitamin D is a steroid vitamin, a group of fat-soluble prohormones, which encourages the absorption and metabolism of calcium and phosphorous. New tests and studies reveal encouraging information about vitamin D's power in maintaining good

health and preventing major illnesses. No longer thought to just play a role in calcium intake and bone growth, vitamin D has a host of other functions in the body, playing a role in prevention of serious diseases, including cancer, diabetes and heart disease, as well as boosting immunity, improving athletic performance, losing weight and more.

Five forms of vitamin D have been discovered — vitamin D1, D2, D3, D4, D5. The two forms that have been found to play a more significant role in human

health are vitamins D2 and D3. People who are exposed to normal quantities of sunlight do not need vitamin D supplements because sunlight promotes sufficient vitamin D synthesis in the skin. The new vitamin D reference ranges established follows the Endocrine Society of Clinical Practice Guidelines. Ranges are as follows:

Deficiency	< 20 ng/mL
Insufficiency	21 – 29 ng/mL
Sufficiency	30 – 100 ng/mL
Possible toxicity	> 100 ng/mL

Reference: Medical News Today

## CCLS Laboratory Leadership Team

CentraCare Laboratory Services would like to introduce you to the newest additions to our leadership team. Laboratory Coordinators oversee daily operations at our CentraCare Health Plaza and Saint Cloud Hospital sites. Our team of Specialists provide technical expertise within their respective departments. Please feel free to contact them for any questions or concerns you may have.

### **Robin Sarner** Laboratory Technical Coordinator



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**It's National Medical Laboratory Professionals Week!**From [www.ascls.org](http://www.ascls.org)

National Medical Laboratory Professionals Week (NMLPW) will take place April 22-28, 2012. NMLPW provides the profession with a unique opportunity to increase public understanding of and appreciation for clinical laboratory personnel.



There are approximately 300,000 practitioners of clinical laboratory science in the United States. Since the development of this career group in the 1920s, the clinical laboratory science professional has played an increasingly vital role in the diagnosis and prevention of disease. Today, the medical laboratory professional is a key member of a health care team.

Thank you for letting us be a part of your team.

In recognition of NMLPW, we have invited Kirk Smith, DVM, MS, PhD, from the Minnesota Department of Health to provide an in-service entitled "Foodborne Illnesses" - Wednesday, May 9, 2012 in the Windfeldt Room at the CentraCare Health Plaza. Please RSVP by May 4, 2012. For more details and registration, contact Clara Morisette at 320-251-2700, ext. 57324 or email [morisettec@centracare.com](mailto:morisettec@centracare.com).