It’s Medical Laboratory Professionals Week!

Happy Medical Laboratory Professionals Week (MLPW) to our Medical Laboratory Technician (MLT) students, faculty, and Program Director at the West Chester campus!

According to the American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science (ASCLS) (n.d.-b), Medical Laboratory Professionals Week is celebrated during the last full week in April each year to recognize the approximately 300,000 clinical laboratory science practitioners in the United States. It’s an opportunity to increase public understanding of and appreciation for clinical laboratory personnel who have played a critical role in the diagnosis and prevention of disease (American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science, n.d.-b).

Lab professionals and the work they do often go unnoticed by the general public and sometimes even by the people employing them. Most of their work is done behind the scenes, but “With the public now demanding the assurance of quality health care and professional accountability, organizations representing practitioners of this critical science have a responsibility to ensure that the public is well informed about clinical laboratory competency” (American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science, n.d.-b, Focus on the Person, para. 2).

As important members of the healthcare team, medical lab professionals help to diagnose and treat disease by collecting, processing, and analyzing blood, body fluids, and other biological samples; performing lab tests and procedures; and maintaining lab equipment (ASCLS, n.d.-a). Nurses count on these tests when caring for their patients, and the information provided by the MLT is critical to identifying, treating, and monitoring patients and their condition and relating lab findings to common diseases and conditions.

Students in the MLT program at Hondros College of Nursing are working toward an Associate’s degree and take classes in chemistry, hematology, immunohematology, immunology, microbiology, and phlebotomy. They can continue their education to become a medical laboratory scientist with a Bachelor’s degree to gain more diagnostic knowledge and capabilities.

MLTs and nurses coexist in the healthcare environment, and nurses can’t do their jobs effectively unless MLTs do theirs efficiently. Manning (2013) says that many healthcare professions view their situations differently, but their main objective is the same: Providing the best patient care possible. This is one of the things MLTs and nurses have in common, and both need to keep in mind that the patient is always the focus of their care (Manning, 2013).
The chart below has been adapted from Manning’s (2013) presentation about bridging the gap between laboratory professionals and nurses. It provides a description of the commonalities and differences between the two professions.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Lab Professionals</th>
<th>Nurses</th>
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<td><strong>Commonalities in Both Professions</strong></td>
<td>Desire to help others, job availability, love of science, challenge, personal/professional goals</td>
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| **Premise the Professions Work From** | • The medical diagnosis  
| | • Education from/about scientific findings  
| | • The scientist (research)  
| | • The patient care plan  
| | • Education of patient and family  
| | • The eyes and ears of the physician |
| **Viewpoint** | • Provide the most accurate test possible  
| | • Help the physician diagnose and/or treat the patient  
| | • Provide the best patient care through laboratory testing  
| | • Provide the best care for the patient so they may return to a functional daily activities of living  
| | • Do everything possible to help the patient get well before discharge  
| | • Prevent a relapse or re-admission through patient care and education |
| **Common Differences in the Professions** | • Prefer less patient contact  
| | • Distant interaction with physicians  
| | • Deal with patient testing, often specific testing  
| | • Want to help physicians find answers to diagnosis and treat patients  
| | • Want patient contact  
| | • Interact with physicians closely  
| | • Like to treat patients as a whole  
| | • Enjoy interaction with family and making a difference in patient care |
| **Approach to Situations** | • Little or no flexibility in testing  
| | • Must follow SOP’s exactly  
| | • Mostly science, less “art”  
| | • Highly regulated  
| | • Critical thinking- less creative  
| | • Flexibility to change the order of steps in patient care  
| | • Follows SOP’s but may sometimes rearrange order  
| | • As much “art” as science  
| | • Can be less regulated  
| | • Can be creative and abstract in approach |

According to the American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science (ASCLS) (n.d.-a), “Medical laboratory science professionals, often called medical laboratoryians, are vital healthcare detectives, uncovering and providing laboratory information from laboratory analyses that assist physicians in patient diagnosis and treatment, as well as in disease monitoring or prevention (maintenance of health)” (para. 1). They perform testing using sophisticated biomedical instrumentation and technology, so they are instrumental in helping nurses care for their patients.

If you run into a medical lab technician/professional this week, whether it’s a student, faculty member, or co-worker, wish them a happy Medical Laboratory Professionals Week. They’ll appreciate it. And, if they’ve made your job easier, please let them know this too.

References
