

Montana Laboratory News

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Editor Cara Bushmaker



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Clinical Laboratory Science
MONTANA

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Laboratory Advocation –

Working Together to Make a Difference

It is never too late to in your career to support your profession.

I am a medical technologist, laboratory consultant, informaticist and member of the Montana ASCLS chapter. I recently attended the ASCLS 2022 Legislative Symposium in Washington D.C. The experience was one of the highlights of my career and rekindled my inner advocate for the laboratory profession and its critical mission within healthcare.

I was inspired by the call to be a laboratory advocate during the Legislative Symposium. The educational sessions and panel discussions gave us the tools and the confidence to lend our voice to creating change. I was energized by my fellow ASCLS attendees and their on-going commitment for lobbying for laboratory issues through the legislative process

The theme throughout the symposium focused on these levers of influence.

- Individual advocacy is powerful. It is important to promote the laboratory profession in all aspects of our life – family, friends and our social networks. We should promote the value of the laboratory and our contribution to healthcare. You might inspire the next generation of laboratory workers.
- Advocation starts with grass roots participation. It takes a village to create change. Joining professional organizations that push for action is critical to building momentum on the ground level. Simple 'shoe-leather' lobbying with Congress is one of the most effective methods in getting the message heard.
- Organizational unity drives change. When there is a ground swell of support of all members of our industry, change starts to happen. We need strong state laboratory organizations to participate in the advocacy process by writing letters, signing petitions and commenting on legislative drafts released to the public.
- Coalition & partnership building across organizations is key to gaining industry consensus. The laboratory community is diverse and represents many different organizations. Partnering with these membership organizations such as [AMT](#), [ASCP](#), and [NILA](#) is an effective method to bring issues forward by sharing resources and messaging. Coalitions and agreement on issues have higher success rates in implementing lasting change.

A Home for a Tumbleweed

It may seem odd for someone who's spent most of her life roaming from one end of the country to the other to be writing an article on community. When you are crazy enough to take the roads less traveled, you often do it alone.

I came to the lab profession late, getting my MLT degree at 58 and MLS certification at 60. This was after 25 years of teaching high school across seven different states. As a teacher, I became aware of the importance and benefits of belonging to a professional organization. Consequently, when I started down the laboratory path, it was a no brainer to join ASCLS.

I was a student when I attended my first ASCLS conference—the Intermountain States Seminar (IMSS), the Region VIII sponsored conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Of course, I knew no one, but going it alone was, by now, second nature. However, two veteran laboratorians from Rock Springs “adopted” me and filled me in on ASCLS and the lab profession in general. At that same conference, I ran into a friend I hadn't seen in 15 years. She and I had worked at the same fish hatchery in Idaho, and both ended up on the medical lab career path. Small world.

“Through actively participating in ASCLS at the local, regional, and national level, I've made connections with people from all over the country, and I didn't have to move any farther than my computer.”

The next conference I attended was the joint state meeting between Wyoming and Colorado. One of my now former college instructors brought me to the business meeting. They were looking for a secretary/treasurer. There weren't any takers, and because I had been a secretary/bookkeeper for the family business, I volunteered and have been in this position for three years now. At that same meeting, I also agreed to be the Wyoming participant in the Leadership Academy to begin at the next IMSS meeting.

Cont...



The Region VIII Leadership Academy is a unique opportunity to educate yourself about management topics, leadership skills and all things ASCLS. The year is underway and applicants for next year are always encouraged!

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ASCP RE-NAMES THE MEDICAL TECHNOLOGIST (MT) CERTIFICATION

Are you a Medical Technologist? A Lab Technician? A Lab Tech? A Clinical Laboratory Scientist? A Medical Laboratory Scientist? Depending on when you entered this profession, you may have been called any one or all of these titles.

In 2021, the ASCP Board of Certification Board of Governors created a nomenclature task force to make recommendations on acceptance and adoption of the unified title of Medical Laboratory Scientist (MLS). This Nomenclature task force came to be after the ASCP and ASCLS published the joint paper, "Standardizing the Professional Title of Medical Laboratory Professionals: A Position Paper of the American Society of Clinical Laboratory Science (ASCLS) and the American Society for Clinical Pathology Board of Certification (ASCP BOC)."

In August 2022, we were officially notified by ASCP that all individuals with MT (medical technologist) credentials will be re-named as MLS (medical laboratory scientists) by the end of 2022. This is a huge milestone for our profession. Our identity needs to be strong and unified, not confusing and leaving others uncertain about who we are and what we do. During the course of our professional history, our professional titles and certifications have changed numerous times. In addition, we have had multiple certification agencies using different titles and exam requirements.

The Medical Laboratory plays such a vital role in providing quality patient diagnoses, care, and treatment. The work we do daily provides data for up to 70% of medical decisions. Our lack of a unified identity has not helped with an understanding from other healthcare professionals and the public about who we are and the important work we do. As the position paper states, "...these groups do not comprehend the level of education and training necessary to achieve competency as a Medical Laboratory Scientist (MLS). Laboratory professionals feel a lack of respect from other healthcare professionals who should view us as peers. This may be due, in part, to the fact that we have limited direct patient interaction and/or that laboratories are often 'invisible' behind locked doors, in the basement, in separate buildings, or off site. Interpretation of federal regulations governing standards for laboratory personnel has allowed those with insufficient laboratory-related education and training to perform moderate and complex testing, further diminishing the profession and confusing the health care community regarding required credentials for laboratory professionals. Another aspect to this problem is that many educational programs closed in the 1990s, resulting in a workforce shortage that has lasted more than 20 years. In response, managers and administrators have hired non-Medical Laboratory Scientist credentialed individuals to perform laboratory testing. To further complicate this situation, our professional credentials, how we refer to ourselves, how others refer to us, and the job/position titles for similarly educated individuals are not consistent."

While this credentialing change by the ASCP BOC is a step in the right direction, there is much work to be done to fully realize the full impact of this change. Hospitals, Reference Laboratories, and Public Health Laboratories need to re-evaluate and re-name job titles. Colleges may need to change their program titles to reflect this change. States with licensure may need to re-evaluate this as well! Even our own professional organization (ASCLS) uses Clinical Laboratory Science in its name. But most importantly, you as a laboratory professional need to start referring to YOURSELF as a MEDICAL LABORATORY SCIENTIST. Be consistent with this new nomenclature; correct others when they call you something else! Advocate at your institutions and state levels for adoption of this nomenclature change.

If you would like to read the entirety of the position paper, please go to: <https://bit.ly/3JqzmM2>

Jennifer Wolcott
ASCLS-MT President Elect
Laboratory Manager, St. Vincent Healthcare

A Home for a Tumbleweed cont...

As part of the Leadership Academy, we took several questionnaires dealing with personality, and it brought out several interesting things. One was that interpersonal relationships was my weakest area. Let me say I've lived my life with no regrets and only two "what ifs," however, there are consequences to that mindset.

I admitted to the group that not only do I hold back from others, but when people find out about how often I move, they don't want to get close to me either. It was then that the Leadership Academy instructors pointed out that, with ASCLS, it didn't matter because, regardless of when, where, or if I move, ASCLS will always be there. I have found this to be true. Through actively participating in ASCLS at the local, regional, and national level, I've made connections with people from all over the country, and I didn't have to move any farther than my computer.

There is a saying, "Once a teacher, always a teacher," and although I found work on the bench challenging and enjoyable, my passion for teaching was pulling me back. So, I searched for a way to bring the two together. Some of these connections have put me on the path of a current project I share with Dino Madsen, director of Casper College MLT Program, to address the severe workforce shortage facing the lab community.

The first stage of the plan is to implement a week-long summer emersion program for high school students to introduce them to the clinical laboratory field. It is the hope that the success of this project will pave the way to introduce phlebotomy and medical laboratory assistant (MLA) certificate career and technical education (CTE) programs at the local high school. I don't pretend that these are my ideas.

The summer emersion program came from the folks at George Washington University, which they shared at the 2021 Clinical Laboratory Educators Conference (CLEC), and the high school programs came from Jim Payne, which he shared at the 2022 CLEC. Not only were these conferences a source of inspiration, but they put me in touch with many like-minded people who were interested in achieving the same goals. This generated an energy that was contagious and encouragement that we are on the right track ... and confirmed that I wasn't crazy.

It's this sense of community energy that I'm hoping to reignite in ASCLS-Wyoming. For too long it was operating on autopilot, and gradually member involvement has dwindled down to only two or three people who are willing to shoulder the responsibilities of running the Wyoming society. We (Wyoming) can do it, but we need more folks to step up and get involved. I have a deep desire for others to experience what I have found with ASCLS and the state of Wyoming. This tumbleweed has found home and is home to stay.


Barbara Ann Harvey, MAEd, MLS(ASCP)CM, ASCLS Membership Committee




MONTANA
COMMUNICABLE
DISEASE EPIDEMIOLOGY

Keep up to date on the latest COVID-19 case counts, hospitalizations, and active cases by county. The state laboratory has expanded hours 7 days a week. Watch for updates via email!

[Montana Response-COVID-19](#)






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Have you checked out the creative Warbler Works yet? A fellow ASCLS member bringing us new ways to share what we do with the world in unique and fun ways. There's something for every labbie in there! Check it out!







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DISCOVER YOUR NEXT

Careers in the Medical Laboratory



ASCP offers a career advocacy volunteer program titled "Career Ambassadors". This opportunity offers a toolkit to use and get out there with resources and share what we do as Medical Laboratory Scientists. We all work hard on this but if you're in an area on your own starting this task can be daunting. Check it out and see if this is a resource you might utilize :)

					
STUDY Classes like biology, chemistry and algebra help you prepare for college.	EXPLORE There are a variety of medical laboratory jobs. Each role plays an important part.	ENROLL Select a school with a medical laboratory science program. Go to naacis.org to search for a program.	INTERN On-the-job experience will help you prepare for working in the laboratory profession.	CERTIFY ASCP certification helps laboratory professionals earn more and provides more job opportunities.	WORK Get a job that fits your skills!



SAVING ACCESS TO LABORATORY SERVICES ACT (SALSA), H.R. 8188/S. 4449

In 2014, Congress passed the Protecting Access to Medicare Act (PAMA). Section 216 of the law reformed the Clinical Laboratory Fee Schedule (CLFS) to establish market-based CLFS rates derived from private payor rates reported to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) by independent labs, hospital labs, and physician office labs. CMS's implementation did not capture sufficient data from all major laboratory segments, resulting in significantly greater decreases in CLFS rates than were projected when PAMA was enacted, threatening access to timely, accurate, and reliable lab services, the nation's laboratory infrastructure, and investment in the next generation of diagnostics, at a time when they are needed most.

The seriousness of ACLA's concerns with PAMA is underscored by its multi-year legal challenge to the law, recently resolved in ACLA's favor with a ruling by the Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit. ACLA challenged CMS's definition of "applicable laboratory" (an entity that is required to report private payor rates to CMS) because the definition did not comport with the statutory language, and it had the effect of excluding almost all hospital laboratories from reporting their private payor rates to CMS, thereby decreasing Medicare CLFS rates below true market-based rates. **The Court of Appeals ruled that CMS's 2016 final rule is arbitrary and capricious.** It also ruled in ACLA's favor on procedural grounds, finding that laboratories have been harmed by PAMA's implementation.

The Court of Appeals decision addressed one of PAMA's most vexing problems yet setting Medicare payment for clinical laboratory services on a sustainable pathway forward requires legislative reform to address PAMA's other serious flaws. Congress has acted three times to delay the second round of data reporting under PAMA – it is now time for passage of the Saving Access to Laboratory Services Act (SALSA) to make critical improvements to PAMA:

- **To ensure that representative data is used in CLFS rate-setting and to alleviate the overall reporting burden on labs, SALSA would require statistical sampling of private payor data from independent labs, hospital labs, and physician office labs for "widely available" tests – those that are performed by more than 100 labs and whose Medicare reimbursement rate is under \$1,000.** Use of statistically valid sampling would eliminate bias in favor or against private payor rates paid to a particular type of lab or from a single market segment. Just 21 of the 1,942 laboratories that reported data in the 2017 reporting period were hospital laboratories. Independent laboratories accounted for 90 percent of data reported to CMS in 2017, yet they accounted for only 50 percent of Medicare CLFS volume at that time.
- **SALSA would set a limit of 5 percent on how much a CLFS rate could be increased or decreased from year to year.** This would create stability for both labs and the Medicare program by mitigating the shock of rapid rate fluctuations up or down. Under current law, a CLFS rate may not be decreased by more than 15 percent annually in each of 2023, 2024, and 2025, after which there are no limits on annual decreases to CLFS rates, and there are no limits on rate increases.
- **SALSA would make improvements to the types of private payor data used to set CLFS rates.** First, it would exclude Medicaid managed care rates from reportable data, because by law, the Medicaid rates may not exceed Medicare CLFS rates. Inclusion of Medicaid managed care rates skews CLFS rates downward artificially. Second, it would greatly reduce the overall reporting burden by permitting laboratories to exclude manual (paper) remittances from their reporting, as long as they do not comprise more than 10 percent of the data the lab is required to report.
- **Data reporting would occur every four years under SALSA.** Under current law, data reporting is to occur every three years. Increasing the length of time between reporting periods would bring stability to CLFS rates and reduce reporting burdens across the laboratory industry.

ACLA urges Congress to enact SALSA this year to reform PAMA, establish sustainable reimbursement rates, ensure Medicare beneficiary access to vital laboratory testing, and support the nation's laboratory infrastructure and investment to advance laboratory testing to improve and save lives.

Laboratory Advocation – Working Together to Make a Difference

My colleagues and I put these principles into action. The delegation from Idaho, Montana and Wyoming went to the Capitol Hill as a united group to discuss two key laboratory issues – 1) Support of the [SALSA Act](#) that advocates for fair laboratory test reimbursement and 2) discussion of a new bill to support laboratory [workforce shortages](#) by providing funding for educational training and student grant & scholarship programs.

Our Idaho cohorts invited us to their legislative meetings so we could experience first-hand how to conduct legislative discussions. I took these valuable learnings to my meetings with the offices of our Montana Senators - Jon Tester and Steve Daines. I was encouraged by the feedback and interest from our state senators in listening to the laboratory industry challenges and issues. It is key that we follow up with our state legislators to continue the conversation and press for support and co-sponsoring of laboratory legislative initiatives.

Participating in the legislative process is an opportunity to appreciate our democracy in action. Many have said that taking part in the legislative process even for a day will change your perspective on the power of community, partnership and unity. My passion for laboratory advocacy has only increased by this experience. I highly encourage our Montana ASCLS members to take advantage of any opportunity to advocate for our profession with our government officials and the general public. Many voices make all the difference when working together towards transformational change.

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ASCLS UPCOMING EVENTS:

1. IMSS-Intermountain States Seminar 2022

October 6-8

Jackson, WY, United States

2. 2022 Legislative Symposium

September 26-27

Hilton Alexandria Old Town

Alexandria, VA

3. 2023 ASCLS-MT Spring Conference

April

Butte Copper King Hotel and Convention Center

Butte, MT

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Follow us to stay up on the latest news affecting our profession, conference updates, technology, government affairs and society updates.

If you have haven't already, follow us, like us and show us some love! You can also stay connected with us and other laboratorians with:

#WeSaveLivesEveryday #IAmASCLS #UnitedAgainstCOVID19 #ASCLSMT #ASCLS #Lab4Life #EveryTestIsOurPatient
#IMSS #AintItGreatInRegionEight

