The Professional Value of Laboratorians
Elissa Passiment, EdM, CLS, Executive Vice President, American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science

State Of Health Care

Complexities of Health Care

• **Individual care**
  o Acute care
  o Preventive care
  o Chronic care

• **Public health care**
  o Environmental Health
  o Emerging infectious disease
  o Life stages
Acute Health Care

- Traditional foundation of individual health care
- Chaotic
- Uninformed decisions made
  - Lack of good data on appropriateness of treatments, preventive strategies, and utilization
- Biased
  - Slanted by special interest groups
- Subject to public opinion

Prevention

- Aging boomers are trying to avoid disease
- Demand for information and direct access increasing
- Science and medicine still developing
- Laboratory's lack of information and access drive customers elsewhere

Chronic Care

- Demographics of health care consumer
  - Doubling of population over age 85 will occur twice by 2050
- Health care “migration”
  - From system of acute care to one of prevention and maintenance
  - Maintenance is the new chronic care
Public Health

- **Safeguarding communities**
  - Monitoring the environment
  - Food safety
  - Infectious disease
  - Emergency preparedness
  - Newborn Screening
  - Linking with all health care settings

Challenges of Health Care

- **Resources**
  - Monetary
  - Facilities
  - Information technology
  - Professionals
- **Successful interaction and integration of all of these resources**

Trends In Laboratory Medicine

- **1970’s – Push to automate**
  - Produce more data on growing number of tests
- **1980’s – Demand for faster turn-around times**
  - Near patient testing with traditional instruments
- **1990’s – Push to miniaturize**
  - Waived category expanded point of care technology
- **2000’s – Demand for personal control**
  - Direct access
  - OTC
Trends in Laboratory Medicine

- Digital and virtual services changing how we work in microscopy
- Drifting towards Diagnostic Services which combine diagnostic imaging and anatomic and clinical pathology
  - Joint reports for surgical specimens
  - Molecular imaging

Value of Laboratorians

- Provide information for:
  - Prevention
  - Diagnosis
  - Treatment
  - Prognosis
  - Risk
  - Appropriate utilization

The Future Is Bright

- Laboratory testing provides patient-specific decision-making information necessary for the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and management of disease or establishment of health.
  - Genetic testing, proteomics and pharmacogenomics enhance utility of lab tests in personalized medicine
  - Evidence based medicine and clinical pathways rely on lab tests
The Future Is Bright

- Laboratory data essential component if Health Information Technology is to be considered high functioning
- Laboratories should be prepared to assume a greater advisory role and provide other support to promote informed self care by consumers.

Trend in Health Care

- Patient centered care

Patient Centered

- Respect for patients' values, preferences, and expressed needs
- Information, communication, and education
- Physical comfort
- Emotional support and alleviation of fear and anxiety
- Involvement of family and friends
- Coordination and integration of care
- Transition and continuity
Patient-Centered in Lab

A patient-centric testing cycle starts when a patient presents to a provider and ends with clinical action or self care based on test results; for us, this

- Extends the pre-analytic and post-analytic phases
- Requires open communication and education
- Changes from traditional testing sites

Drivers for Change

- Increasing numbers of people with multiple chronic conditions who require greater skill in self management and self testing.
- Increasing availability of community-based retail sites for health care (e.g., in large national retail and pharmacy chains) expands direct access to affordable services.

Drivers for Change

- Marketing of new and innovative testing technologies (e.g., genetic testing) directly to consumers via the Internet increases demand for laboratory services.
- Increasing patient cost-sharing creates consumer need and demand for trusted, readily available information to support informed choices.
Drivers for Change

- Changing social norms
  o Prompt consumers and others to express greater desire for consumer ownership of their health care information (including laboratory test results).

Value of Laboratorians

- Laboratorians can support (at the patient level):
  o Communication and partnership between patients/consumers and health care providers,
  o Patient/consumer education,
  o Patient/consumer self management of chronic conditions, and
  o The needs of special patient populations.

Needs/Gaps

- Patients/consumers must comprehend or be able to utilize laboratory information in both the preanalytic and postanalytic phases of the testing cycle.
- Preanalytic communications: consumers need information about:
  o Why a particular test is being ordered,
  o How the test is performed, and
  o What the risks are.
Needs/Gaps

• **Postanalytic communications for patients:**
  - Discussion about laboratory test results that should clarify what the results mean for patients' health and medical care.
  - Few patient-provider interactions meet criteria for completeness in informed decision making however.

Needs/Gaps

• **Inadequate consumer-centric information to supplement communication between providers and patients** is a major contributor to the gap in patients' knowledge, understanding.

Needs/Gaps

• **Large discrepancies often exist between the level at which the materials are written and patients' functional literacy levels.**
Future Value

- Laboratorians need to work with health care providers and patients to develop:
  - A patient/consumer-friendly, standardized nomenclature and report formats for laboratory results that
    - Facilitates understanding of important information about screening, diagnostic, and monitoring tests.

Future Value

- Laboratorians can design educational materials that will improve patients’ understanding of their health conditions
  - Lab Tests Online great example

A Different Future?

- Several trends increase the value of laboratorians
  - The continued proliferation of new, complex laboratory tests;
  - Greater emphasis on patient safety in medical practice;
  - Inadequate medical education on laboratory testing despite its growing importance in clinical care; and
  - The variable quality of “curbside” consultations with pathologists.
Pressures

• Information access - amount, quality, immediacy
• Productivity measures that are not appropriately focused
• Service sites
  o Moving from traditional settings for both public and individual health systems
  o Pose major coordination challenges

Other Initiatives

• Development of evidence-based methods to identify and evaluate Best Practices in Laboratory Medicine.
  
  http://wwwn.cdc.gov/futurelabmedicine/

Rituals Of A Professional

• What they do for a living defines who they are
• Associate with colleagues to affirm themselves
  o Get new ideas, new energy, re-creation, renewal of self
  o Reason for attending annual meeting of the profession
• Develop and adhere to an ethical code
  From Beginning to End - The Rituals of Our Lives
Excellence In Performance
- Research on elite performers
- The biggest difference between them and lesser performers is the cumulative amount of practice they’ve had
  - The most important talent was the talent for practice
  - Top performers dislike practice as much as others
    - But they have the willingness to keep at it anyway
- From Complications by Atul Gawande

Professions
- Their own language
- A recognized body of knowledge
- Insulated from the rest of the world by the work experiences and the mandatory responsibilities
  - Only fellow professionals know what it is really like to do what you do

Professional Gatherings
- Where new and better can be found
  - Almost an obligation to attend
- Where there is a place full of people who know what it is really like to do what you do
- Sense of belonging
- For the length of the meeting, “our own nation” exists
- From Complications by Atul Gawande
What Are We Doing?

- Two stone cutters were cutting stone for the building of a great cathedral. Sir Christopher Wren asked them what they were doing. One stone cutter said: “I am cutting stone”. The other answered: “I am building a cathedral”.

•