

## OSMT & CSMLS Certification Programs

The **Ontario Society of Medical Technologists (OSMT)** has received several questions about the certification programs of lab assistants/technicians offered by the OSMT and by the national society, the **Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science (CSMLS)**. The OSMT would like to share these questions and answers in order to provide an understanding of the differences between the two programs.

### **Question: What is the difference between being certified with the OSMT and being certified with CSMLS?**

The **OSMT** has been offering a laboratory assistant/technician program since 1988 and to date has certified approximately 9,000 individuals in Ontario as Medical Laboratory Assistants/Technicians (MLA/Ts). The OSMT's certification program is based on current practises in the laboratory workplace in Ontario. These practises are reflected in the OSMT's "*MLA/T Core Competency Guidelines*" that are used by schools to design lab assistant/technician training programs.

By law, all such training programs in Ontario must be registered and approved by the Ontario **Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU)**. The OSMT has an agreement with the Ministry to assess and approve school programs. The Ministry will not approve a lab assistant training program that has not been approved by the OSMT.

Many years ago, the **CSMLS** offered a certification program for lab assistants but discontinued it in the early 1980's because the scopes of practise of lab assistants varied so greatly from province to province that it was impossible to set a national standard. This situation has not changed as lab assistants continue to perform differing levels of duties in many of the provinces. Needless to say, this is a concern and we commend the CSMLS for attempting to address the situation for the provinces that have no minimum standards by re-introducing a national certification program. The "pre-analytical" scope of national certification should help to fulfill the need for at least some level of standards in the provinces that have none of their own.

Here, in Ontario, we are very fortunate to have a higher-level certification process that was designed specifically for our province's needs. British Columbia, with very similar workplace practises, also provides certification to individuals who graduate from programs approved by the BCCLS as well as to people who have received MLA/T certification from the OSMT.

### **Question: Will we get a certificate when we pass the exam with OSMT?**

The OSMT issues a "**Medical Laboratory Assistant/Technician (MLA/T)**" certificate to every individual who successfully passes the OSMT exam. MLA/Ts then become eligible for membership with the Society, enjoying the same rights and privileges as Medical Laboratory Technologists (MLTs).

### **Question: Will we get a certificate when we pass the exam with CSMLS?**

According to a CSMLS by-law, only CSMLS members may hold CSMLS certificates. Upon passing the CSMLS exam, individuals will receive a record of result but will only receive a certificate upon request if they become members of the CSMLS. The certificate must however be returned to the national society should an individual later choose to discontinue membership.

### **Question: Will the certification for OSMT or CSMLS be accepted in the other provinces? In the U.S.?**

The question about "acceptance" in the other provinces is difficult to answer because at the present time, lab assistants/technicians do not have "regulated health profession" status in any province. We would therefore have to look at the individual provincial "acts" or "regulations" that apply to health care provision to determine whether there are any provisions for the "qualifications" or "scopes of practise" of lab assistants/technicians. In Ontario, there are some provisions for lab "technicians" in an Ontario regulation which are detailed in the "*OSMT MLA/T Core Competency Guidelines*".

Legislation covering lab assistants varies greatly from province to province. This inconsistency is illustrated by comparing the province of British Columbia, where there is no legislation for lab assistants, and the province of Quebec, where legislation prohibits lab assistants from practising at all.

Relative to the question about "acceptance" of OSMT or CSMLS certification in the United States, I would think that the scopes of practise might again vary from state to state. A definitive answer as to whether either certification would be recognized is impossible to give at this time.

I believe that the "acceptance" factor of most concern is about the level of recognition given by employers to certification. In Ontario, you will find that most laboratories favour those who hold an OSMT MLA/T certificate and that many laboratories will actually require OSMT certification as a pre-requisite to employment.

I do not know how one can predict the employer acceptance of national certification as the first exam sitting is only taking place in June 2003.

One important consideration when deciding which exam to take....

The federal government has delegated the provision of health care to the provincial health ministries and the job of regulating health professionals is also a provincial responsibility. You may be aware that the OSMT is considering the pursuit of "regulated health profession" status for people who have been certified as Medical Laboratory Assistants/Technicians by the OSMT. In this respect, the OSMT would of course give full and, in all probability, exclusive support to the recognition of the credentials of the individuals who hold OSMT MLA/T certification.

For a better understanding of the situation in Ontario please refer to an article that I have written about "regulated health professions" and legislation that covers lab assistants/technicians. It is posted on the OSMT website. ([www.osmt.org](http://www.osmt.org) -- click on "Advocate Magazine", click on "Information for MLA/Ts about professional regulation").

Please feel free to contact me with any further questions or concerns.

Sincerely,  
Blanca McArthur  
Executive Director