



Feature



Role in Management: Aspiring to a role in laboratory management

Over the next decade, laboratory medicine will face a manpower crisis. Technologists are retiring at a faster rate than new MLT students are being trained (Davis, 2002, Davis, 2008). Although significant headway has been made between 2002 and 2008, the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science estimates the number of students being trained will fill only 86% of the vacancies created by medical laboratory technologists who are eligible for retirement (Davis, 2008).

Management positions will be heavily affected by these retirements because there is a historic tendency to promote from within the laboratory profession to fill supervisory and administrative roles. It is not uncommon for senior positions in the laboratory to be filled with employees who are older. In fact, supervisory and administrative roles are the typical career path for medical laboratory technologists. A promotion to a supervisory or management position is often considered a reward for achieving technical excellence.

This career path is reasonable considering the small size and high degree of complexity of many laboratories. Laboratory managers require a good deal of technical knowledge to oversee the activities within the laboratory and it is common for a manager to perform technical duties as well as administrative duties. Therefore, looking outside of the laboratory for a manager with formal management training is seldom a feasible alternative. However, developing strong technical skills and knowledge is not a strong basis for the broad range of administrative activities that a manager must perform. Preparation for a supervisory or managerial position is just as important as the preparation that is required to become a technical expert.

Management is the process of getting work done efficiently and effectively with and through other people. Laboratory management roles include overseeing technical issues, human resources and scheduling,

establishing and monitoring quality systems, organizing the finances, and communicating with staff and stakeholders. Coordinating these tasks, and ensuring the activities involved work in harmony, is what management is all about.

These roles are not unlike the roles of managers in other departments or industries. However, for many professionals detailed training is required to qualify for a supervisory or management position. Management training is not typically part of the medical laboratory technologist curriculum, so management skills must be picked up along the way. There are formal training programs available which are geared to healthcare management (such as the Canadian Hospital Association's Health

- Enabling others to act
- Critical thinking
- Facilitating organizational change/improvements
- People management
- Resource management
- Building collaborative partnerships
- Achieving results
- Developing oneself

Developing these attributes takes a combination of training, practice, and attitude. Understanding your personal values will shape the way you develop each of these attributes. Understanding your short and long-term professional advancement aspirations will provide focus for the skills you will need to develop to achieve your career advancement goals. Understanding

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Services Management course – see www.learning.cha.ca/educ/. There are also more generic management programs presented by community colleges and universities. Often these courses are presented in a series with a diploma to recognize completion of the training.

For those aspiring to fill a laboratory leadership role, it is worth the effort to complete formal management courses as part of your professional development. Obtaining a CHA Healthcare Management diploma, a general Business Administration diploma, or a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree could make you a stronger candidate when a supervisory or management role becomes available.

It is equally important to develop the attributes and personal habits which will allow you to be successful in a leadership position. These include:

- Communicating effectively
- Ethics and integrity
- Inspiring a shared vision

your career aspirations and motivation for achieving them will affect your attitude. Getting involved in committee work and projects provides a practical opportunity to practice the skills and to demonstrate the progress you are making.

Effective communication skills are the most important attribute of a supervisor or manager. Effective communication includes both verbal and written communication. Within the laboratory there are many ways to develop and refine your communication skills. There is an endless array of manuals, memos, and reports to work on. To develop your writing skills you can also prepare articles for publication in your laboratory or hospital newsletter, or journals produced by organizations such as the Ontario Society of Medical Technologists or the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science. There are opportunities to practice your presentation skills at staff

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meetings, by putting on educational events or in-service education, or by serving on a committee. You can also join an organization such as Toastmasters to get training, coaching, and practice at speaking in front of a crowd.

Additional managerial skills can be gained through participation in professional organizations such as the Ontario Society of Medical Technologists, the College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Ontario, or the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science. Each of these organizations provides members with opportunities to serve on their Board of Directors or to participate on committees. Participation provides an opportunity to network with

educational opportunities, but their focus is on laboratory management. Details about membership can be found at www.clma.org. Both CCHSE and the CLMA provide their members with publications, access to their website, reduced rates on educational events, and information about job opportunities – all useful if you are looking at fast-tracking your career progression in a management role.

Medical laboratory technologists tend to be task-oriented and learn by performing tasks, perfecting their technique through practice. An effective way to get experience in managing is to take on a role of managing a project. This can be as simple as planning an educational event, or as complex as leading a team responsible for selecting and implementing a new piece of equipment for the laboratory. The

they affect each other. It is not necessary to become an expert in all of these areas, provided you have systems that provide the necessary support. Often the human resources department will provide a lead role in dealing with personnel issues and the finance department will provide a lead role in dealing with budgets and finance issues. This allows a laboratory manager to focus on overseeing the operations of the laboratory and planning. However, over time, it is likely that you will pick up knowledge, skills, and best practices from these experts and will be able to deal with human resources issues and finance issues with less guidance from other departments.

In medium and large laboratory operations there are likely to be a number of supervisory and management roles. Typically this group works closely to oversee the operation of the laboratory. Being part of a management team is a good way to develop management skills and leadership attributes.

With the pending retirements of a large number of current laboratory supervisors and managers, there are bound to be many opportunities for medical technologists to move into supervisory positions. By being proactive in developing your knowledge and skills, you will be prepared when these opportunities become available. ❖

References

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colleagues from other regions and to learn from their experiences. Learning about, and adopting best practices that have been proven elsewhere, provides an opportunity to introduce these practices to your organization with low risk.

Those who wish to move into management or supervisory roles may want to join organizations such as the Canadian College of Health Service Executives (CCHSE) or the Clinical Laboratory Management Association (CLMA). Membership in the CCHSE is targeted at healthcare administrators and provides a formal credentialing process. By completing a formal study program and passing an exam, CCHSE will issue Certified Health Executive (CHE) and Fellow of the Canadian College of Health Service Executives (FCCHSE) credentials which are well recognized within the healthcare sector. Details about CCHSE membership and credentials can be found at www.cchse.org. The CLMA also provides

project management skills that you develop through such activities cover a large number of the skills required by a manager (getting work done efficiently and effectively with and through other people). Taking a lead role on a project is also an opportunity to determine if you have an interest and an aptitude for taking on a supervisory or administrative role.

Management can be divided into several areas of focus. For a clinical laboratory, the focus requires a mix of operational management, financial management, and human resources management. For those employed in a commercial setting, there may also be a focus on marketing and sales. The management principles of each of these areas of focus are similar (plan, organize, direct, and monitor). However, the tools that are used and the knowledge that is required are different. Each of these aspects of management practice is interrelated, so it is important to have an understanding of how