

AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR CLINICAL LABORATORY SCIENCE



Letter to the Editor,
The Chronicle of Higher Education

I read with keen interest “A Clinical Look at Clinical Doctorates” by Drs. Siler and Smith Randolph in the July 21 issue of The Chronicle for Higher Education. Our profession, clinical laboratory science, through a collaborative effort initiated by the American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science (ASCLS), is engaged in the implementation of its keystone professional (terminal) degree, the doctorate in clinical laboratory science. The process we engaged in to determine the need for and the development of this professional doctorate is extensive and certainly addresses the concerns raised by the authors. A comprehensive assessment of the healthcare environment was conducted with input from both academia and practice. From these studies, gaps in the healthcare delivery system were identified that would benefit from a doctorally-prepared clinical laboratory practitioner able to apply knowledge and skills to administrative, public policy and most importantly, patient care situations.

A national debate involving all interest groups within the clinical laboratory science (CLS) community occurred during which the profession determined that the gap in defined laboratory practice was different enough from the practice of the baccalaureate entry level clinical laboratory scientist to warrant the design of a new practitioner. National professional debate also clarified that the academic level of this practitioner should be the doctorate thus focusing on this as a terminal degree **not on changing the professional academic entry level**. This new practitioner is not the result of academic “degree creep” but represents advanced practice built on expanded, complex knowledge of rigor comparable to established professional doctorates like the Ed.D., D.O., J.D., and M.D.

Task forces within the profession have worked collaboratively to produce competencies, program curriculum, and to identify funding sources for program implementation. We believe that this cornerstone practitioner, prepared to practice in clinical venues, in manufacturing, and in academia, will enhance recruitment into the profession by enriching the practice of the baccalaureate entry-level practitioner (through applications of evidence based practice) and by providing career advancement opportunities. Until now, laboratory practitioners interested in advanced education received graduate degrees in other related fields of study. In addition, the DCLS will contribute to the CLS body of knowledge by requiring competency in translational research. This will help to address the problem of medical errors from a laboratory perspective. We anticipate these

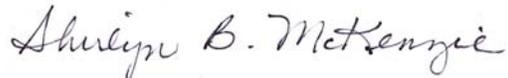
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increases in patient safety and medical effectiveness to translate directly into cost-savings for the healthcare delivery system

Multiple institutions, both public and private around the country, have expressed a desire to begin DCLS programs. Since institutions vary as to their ability to offer the Ph.D. and/or the clinical (professional) degree, we are working to develop models to be utilized as appropriate in the institutional application and approval process. The clinical doctorate will be accredited by the specialty accrediting body within the profession. Further, issues of access are being addressed by identifying the foundational principles on which distance delivery platforms and program consortia can be built.

On behalf of the ASCLS, I thank you for the opportunity to share our professional achievements and plans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shirlyn B. McKenzie".

Shirlyn McKenzie, Ph.D., CLS
President
American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science