

Important New Acronym in Laboratory Medicine: IQLM

Did you know that more than 7 billion laboratory tests are performed in the United States each year—and that these test results influence an estimated 70% of medical decisions? These facts help us to see just how dependent the health care system is on laboratory services. It is our professional duty to provide timely, accurate, and reliable laboratory information and services to our clinicians and patients. There can be no room for medical errors that harm patients.

The 1999 and 2001 Institute of Medicine (IOM) reports (*To Err is Human* and *Crossing the Quality Chasm*) focused the attention of both the health care industry and the public on the effects of medical errors on the quality of health care, including patient safety. Unfortunately, our laboratory profession has contributed to the tragic stories of patients who have been hurt when samples and reports have been lost, miscalculations and misdiagnoses have been made, reports have carried erroneous information, and other mishaps have occurred in the total testing process. All these quality lapses continue despite our best professional intentions and effort—but then we all know where the road paved with good intention often leads.

The laboratory and patient safety. Knowing that the laboratory is involved in medical errors that can harm patients, the Division of Laboratory Systems for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention convened a meeting of interested persons and laboratory partner organizations in April 2003. The meeting participants discussed the topics of a national network of partner organizations, a national quality report for laboratory medicine, a set of national quality indicators to measure processes and outcomes of laboratory services and health care, and award categories for recognizing quality laboratory practices.

In the interim 2 years, persons appointed as volunteers to specific work groups continued to convene via conference calls, e-mails, and meetings. Their objective was to further explore the topics of networks, indicators, and awards, and formulate strategies for how laboratories, professional organizations, suppliers of laboratory instruments and information systems, and other partners can work together to realize the vision of improving quality in laboratory medicine.

Landmark summit at the IQLM! The new Institute for Quality in Laboratory Medicine (IQLM) will be introduced at an upcoming meeting set for April 28th through April 30th this year, in Atlanta. The IQLM is a public-private partnership that has joined laboratory professionals, clinicians, accrediting organizations payers, health systems, device manufacturers, patients, and government agencies to improve laboratory services by achieving the higher goals of reducing medical errors, improving patient safety, and improving the quality of care.

An impressive meeting agenda features presentation of the first laboratory “Excellence in Practice” awards for improvements in quality of care, patient safety, quality processes, clinical integration, and technical advancement. The CLMA and its ThinkLab

partner, the ASCP, played an important role in obtaining valuable information through CLMA’s newly formed Quality Advisory Council. Council members—many of them also ASCP members—worked with the IQLM to develop a survey to assess current laboratory practices with regard to quality. More than 500 hospital laboratory administrative directors responded to the survey (and if you are an ASCP member who took the time to respond, we thank you!). The information obtained from the survey provided the indicators work group with an idea of the quality indicators that are presently being tracked in hospital laboratories. An overview of the survey was shared with attendees of the 2005 CLMA/ASCP ThinkLab conference and the final results will be presented at the IQLM conference. The indicators work group will present the results of an intensive research study to review a core set of quality indicators that laboratories could track to determine their performance across the total testing process. An evening poster session will allow attendees to speak directly with authors who will share results of their laboratory improvement efforts. Also, the business case for quality will be presented from 8 different health care perspectives. The meeting will conclude with the recommendations of the IQLM work groups and a discussion of developing a quality agenda for laboratory medicine.

Be there! This inaugural IQLM conference is the most significant event this year related to patient safety in laboratory medicine. *It is important that someone from your laboratory attends this meeting* so that you can stay on the cutting edge of delivering quality laboratory services to the public. Not only will you hear from nationally renowned experts in laboratory practice, but also there will be plenty of opportunity to interact and question them on how to build excellence into your laboratory—Brent James, MD, Dennis O’Leary, MD, James Westgard, PhD, George Lundberg, MD, and others—will all be there! In addition, the conference will devote a session to sharing examples of proven quality projects in existence around the country. Come to ask questions, come to be inspired, or come to find new sources of information on quality and safety for your laboratory practice. There’s still time to register, so please visit: www.iqlm.org.

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