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# Quality Qorner

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## The Gift That Keeps On Giving

It's holiday time again...already! Whatever religion or traditions you and yours choose to follow, it usually involves the giving of gifts. We give gifts to family members, dear friends, relatives, and others. Wouldn't it be nice if we could also afford to give gifts to the patients we serve, as well as all our favorite coworkers, and fellow laboratory professionals! No, I'm not suggesting you rob a bank to accomplish this great handout. The gifts we can give our patients and fellow professionals won't cost you any money—only some mental energy.

Do you remember my friend Wanda—the medical technologist-turned-nurse and laboratory customer I wrote about earlier this year? Wanda gave me a gift to share with you and I'm giving you this gift so that you in turn can share it with your fellow health care professionals for the benefit of your patients. It's the gift of an idea—one that can improve efficiency and patient care. Everyone benefits. Here's Wanda's story.

Many patients have peripherally-inserted central catheter (PICC) lines in their upper chest for the ease of medication administration and blood drawing. Most hospitals have a policy that only registered nurses are allowed to draw blood samples from the PICC lines. The reason for this policy is that by limiting the number of personnel who manipulate the PICC lines the chances for dislodgement, infection, or clotting greatly decrease. However, this policy complicates the morning patient blood sample collection rounds because whenever phlebotomists (laboratory or non-laboratory) need to draw a blood sample from a patient with a PICC line, it has to be collected by a registered nurse. Therefore phlebotomists need to stop where they are in the morning collection, find the patient's nurse, interrupt her/him from their respective scheduled nursing tasks, and then wait until the nurse draws the sample. As a result, phlebotomists waste time waiting; nurses are disrupted; sample delivery to the laboratory is delayed; sample processing personnel waste time waiting; testing is delayed, and the physician customers are unhappy with late-morning delivery of laboratory test results.

Wanda and the other night nurses on her patient care unit decided they would call the laboratory and ask to be sent up through the pneumatic tube system the sets of blood sample tubes and labels for the morning collection for each patient who had a PICC line. The nurses asked for the sets of collection tubes and labels to be sent around 4:00 AM so they could collect the samples as they were doing their early-morning patient assessment and care. The nurses returned the labeled samples to the laboratory via the pneumatic tube system between 4:30 AM and 5:00 AM thus allowing the laboratory to get a head start on the morning's testing load. In Wanda's words, "It was a win-win. This was a good solution for everyone."

The laboratory at Wanda's hospital was so pleased with the results of this collaboration that they decided to apply the concept across all patient care units for patients with PICC lines. The laboratory developed a process for the night shift in which it would send out packets with blood sample collection tubes, labels, and instructions for morning collections on patients with PICC lines. The collected samples were returned to the laboratory without need for a phlebotomist—an overall efficient use of available resources. This simple idea provided a powerful gift for all involved—nurses, laboratory professionals, patients, and physicians—the gift of a little more time. If every day had a success story like that, maybe we could banish contentious nursing-laboratory relations forever!

Wanda thinks there are more success stories out there. She has an idea for how we laboratory professionals can use this Quality Qorner column "in the interests of fostering better relationships and communications between the laboratory and its customers, which would also further the ultimate goal of quality." She suggests that I ask you, the readers, to submit situations or problems about patient care and quality that were successfully resolved by collaboration between the laboratory and another hospital department. On the flip side, Wanda also suggests that I ask you, the readers, to submit any unresolved problems your laboratory has been having difficulty solving with regard to laboratory-nursing relationships and communication. I'll put them into this column and ask if other laboratories have had the same problem and how they solved it. Wanda has also promised to continue to send me laboratory-nursing situations that she sees from the "other side" and I'll share those with you too.

The gift of an idea from the power of thought...no frantic shopping in bad weather, no worries about if you can afford it, no post-holiday charge card bills. Gifts *you* can give each other that help others as well. Everybody benefits. It's a win-win.

### *This Month's Quality Quote:*

"...a gift, though small, is precious."  
—Homer, *The Iliad*

*To send me your ideas or problems, write them in an MS-Word document and attach the document to an e-mail to me at [lmberte@worldnet.att.net](mailto:lmberte@worldnet.att.net). I'll be happy to share the good ideas and ask for help on the problems.*



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