A Bright Future

Exciting new technologies and a growing need for skilled professionals place laboratorians at the forefront of excellent patient care.

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Economic Influence
Many people remain nervous about the economic future. Job and economic instability have been part of our lives over the last decade. Realizing that I am now moving into the point of being an old-timer in laboratory medicine, I look back on the reasons I set a business-management position to become a technician before continuing on to become a scientist. At the time, we were putting out a deep global recession from the late ’70s and much of pension funds. Many turned up-nation or lost decades of pension savings, and the U.S. had engaged in Desert Storm. Looking at statistics, the need for healthcare professionals was projected to increase with baby boomers reaching retirement, making healthcare a pretty safe bet.

In those regards, times have changed very little. There is a decade of growth and widespread prosperity with the Dot Com Bubble followed by 9/11. A few decades in healthcare as a scientist have shown that I bet on the right horse. While there is some validity to the occasional complaint about a lack of respect for the lab or the pay compared to other healthcare professions, I am content in this career—and the profession.

Every year, there are new and exciting technologies and methods to discover and put into practice, especially in molecular diagnostics and automation across nearly every modality. Each year, we, as laboratory professionals, have the opportunity to make a difference in another person’s life, and we expect nothing from those patients in return. We’re in it for what we get out of helping them. The turtle helps across the road will not be buying you chocolate, but you help it cross the lane. Every day we have the chance to do new and interesting things and be a hero.

Changing Face of the Workforce
Many attention has been paid to the Baby Boom generation, one of the largest generation in history. They made up about 50 percent of the clinical lab workforce and as they retire, they not only create job openings, but also increase the demand for healthcare services by 20 percent. Within the next 3 years, half of them will retire, leaving an additional 35 percent job openings, or 400,000 open positions in the U.S. That certainly raises the cost of education and obtaining a position in the clinical lab is a good short-term fix, but what about long-term?

Cradle the generation that is just beginning to be recognized, the Millennials (born 1980–2000). This generation is 25 percent larger than the Baby Boom generation. Like the Boomers, they are hardworking, hard-playing kids, but unlike the Boomers, they need to be healthcare workers who put much effort and focus on maintaining good health. As the Boomers phase out, Millennials need to be healthcare workers who put much effort and focus on maintaining good health. As the Boomers phase out, Millennials need to be healthcare workers who put much effort and focus on maintaining good health.

In these uncertain times, there is one thing I am more certain of than more than two decades ago when I joined the laboratorian ranks: being a laboratory, tech is still a sacred profession, to get your hands dirty, skilled lab professionals will still be needed for blood banks, microbiology, molecular diagnostics, anatomic pathology, and many more complex, immunology, chemistry, and toxicology.

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More on the Web
(2) Laboratory careers opportunities can be seen at www.ameelectronics.com.

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