ASCP Vacancy Survey Reveals Laboratory Workforce Shortage Expanding

As more lab professionals retire, recruitment becomes crucial

Chicago, Illinois (PRWEB) September 22, 2015 -- Health systems across the nation are seeing vacancy rates climb as baby boomers who held off retiring a few years ago during the sluggish economy are now handing in their retirement notices, according to the newly-released ASCP 2014 Vacancy Survey.

The areas of the medical laboratories that have the highest numbers of staff are the same areas that will be hardest hit by these retirements, according to the Vacancy Survey which was published in the October 2015 issue of the journal, AJCP. These areas include chemistry, which had the overall highest percentage of employees anticipated to retire in the next five years, at 23.60 percent; hematology, at 19.51 percent; microbiology, at 19.48 percent; and blood banks, at 19.19 percent.

“These are the same areas of the lab that provide most of the stat tests results for emergency rooms and operating rooms across the country,” says Lynnette Chakkaphak, MS, MT(ASCP), an ASCP Board Member who serves on the ASCP Vacancy Survey Working Group. “With losses of almost one-quarter of their staffing, laboratories may be nearly crippled.”

The shortage of qualified laboratory professionals is so high in her northern Florida region that she recently had to recruit a qualified candidate from Boston for a histology supervisor position and another candidate in Long Island, N.Y., to fill a blood bank manager position at her lab.

Conducted every two years, the ASCP Vacancy Survey serves as the primary source for industry labor, government, and academic analysts. Overall, this year’s 1,353 respondents (who hold management level or human resource positions) represent 33,162 medical laboratory employees across the United States. The ASCP 2014 Vacancy Survey findings show that overall vacancy rates increased in all departments of the medical laboratory, except for cytology and cytogentetics. It also shows higher anticipated retirement rates for both staff and supervisors.

“The five-year retirement picture paints a gloomy picture for patient care,” Ms. Chakkaphak says. “With Chemistry Departments in some areas of the country losing as many as 24 percent of their staff to retirement, the turn-around times at many facilities will be impacted.”

Recruitment of qualified lab professionals in the workforce and students in lab programs will be key in filling the higher vacancy rates revealed from the survey results in 2014, according to the report.

The expanding use of automation may require fewer technologists for routine work, and increasing use of test utilization management may decrease test volumes, which may help offset the workforce shortage, surmised M. Sue Zaleski, MA, HT(ASCP)SCT, also a member of the Vacancy Survey Working Group. “Some disciplines, such as blood bank, microbiology and molecular diagnostics, are seeing an evolution in automation and the gains in efficiencies. Collectively, will these gains be enough to delay/diminish a workforce crisis?” suggests Ms. Zaleski.

Results from past surveys show that laboratory medicine is a rapidly evolving field. For the 2012 survey, seven
new departments—core laboratory, laboratory safety, molecular biology/diagnosis, reproductive medicine and
genetics, and specimen collecting—were added to the 10 laboratory areas surveyed in 2010.

ASCP Responds to Workforce Shortage
As laboratory professionals retire, there is still a significant effort nationwide to recruit more young
professionals to enter the field of medical laboratory science. For years, ASCP has had several initiatives in
place to address the medical laboratory workforce shortage. These include:

• ASCP Career Ambassadors program sponsored by Roche, in which ASCP members visit pre-college
  students across the country to talk about medical laboratory careers;
• ASCP-Siemens Scholarships, which support individuals pursuing careers in the medical laboratory;
• A collaboration with the Clinton Global Initiative to expand the pipeline of individuals pursuing medical
  laboratory careers in New York State, a template for other initiatives nationwide;
• ASCP 40 Under Forty, a program which recognizes talented pathologists, pathology residents, and
  laboratory professionals who are making significant contributions to the profession;
• Building a Laboratory for the Future Day, held at ASCP’s Annual Meetings, where local high school
  students meet world-renowned scientists and participate in hands-on science experiments while learning about
  careers in the medical laboratory;
• What’s My Next, a comprehensive strategy targeted toward science-oriented high school students that
  positions laboratory medicine as a potential career path. A key component will be a robust whatsmynext online
  portal that engages students with interactive mini-games, a Lab Hero Challenge module, and modules that
  follow a patient’s journey as it relates to a common disease state;
• Nextpo, a component of What’s My Next, that will be introduced at ASCP 2015 Long Beach in October
  2015. NEXTPO will bring together member, educators, students, and industry partners for hands on science
  experiments and art and science gallery activities, and engaging young professionals in presenting short talks
  and discussions with high school students in a relatable tone; and
• Lab Management University, launched in 2013 to teach leadership skills to pathologists and lab
  professionals seeking to ascend the career ladder and for those already in leadership positions who are seeking
to hone their management skills.

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About ASCP
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