

*The American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) and the American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science (ASCLS) along with the following societies, have provided support for the recommendations of the ASCP Board of Certification Nomenclature Task Force, for Promoting the Medical Laboratory Science Profession through Standardized titles: American Association of Pathologists' Assistants (AAPA); American Medical Technologists (AMT); American Society for Microbiology (ASM); American Society of Cytopathology (ASC); American Society of Hematology (ASH); Association for the Advancement of Blood & Biotherapies (AABB); Association of Genetic Technologists (AGT); and the National Society for Histotechnology (NSH).*

## **Promoting the Medical Laboratory Science Profession through Standardized Titles**

Recommendations of the American Society for Clinical Pathology Board of Certification Nomenclature Task Force

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The task force identified the following complexities to be addressed by any recommendation on job titles for medical laboratory personnel.

- Varying levels of academic preparation,
- specialization at job entry,
- varying employer prerogatives in establishing job qualifications,
- the need to comply with state and federal laws, and
- multiple credentialing agencies.

The purpose of this document is to outline a simplified nomenclature for clinical laboratory testing personnel that can be used to:

- Guide employers in updating and revising job titles for consistency across employers
- Guide educational institutions concerning program and degree titles
- Provide editors, authors, and journalists proper titles of individuals and the profession(s)
- Educate the general health care community
- Guide regulatory agencies including licensing authorities, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and Centers for Medicare/Medicaid Services (CMS)
- Inform in vitro diagnostics manufacturers and their advertisers regarding professional titles

The task force adopted the following guiding principles in developing standardized job titles:

- Simplify the nomenclature of medical laboratory professionals
- Provide the public and other health professionals an understandable laboratory professional title
- Differentiate certified and non-certified individuals
- Distinguish individuals with different levels of academic preparation, i.e. different levels of practice
- Retain existing credential title
- Be consistent with current state and federal regulations

The Task force recommends adoption of the following nomenclature for the purposes outlined above:

Brief Job Description	Existing Job Titles	Proposed Job Title	Designated Abbreviation, e.g. badges*	Comments
Baccalaureate-level clinical laboratory testing personnel who are certified and meet CLIA regulatory requirements for testing personnel	Medical Laboratory Scientist/Medical Technologist/Clinical Laboratory Scientist	certified Medical Laboratory Scientist	cMLS	The “c” denotes certification to distinguish from non-certified individuals. The certifying agency is not indicated so someone certified as Medical Technologist by agencies such as AMT would still be cMLS in job title if they hold a bachelor’s degree as well as certification. Practitioners with specific expertise in one department would be included here if they have at least a BS degree and are certified.
Baccalaureate-level clinical laboratory testing personnel who are NOT certified and meet CLIA regulatory requirements for testing personnel	Medical Laboratory Scientist/Medical Technologist/Clinical laboratory scientist	Medical Laboratory Scientist	MLS	Non-certified baccalaureate-educated individuals performing the job tasks of certified MLS. Practitioners with specific expertise in one department would be included here if they have at least a BS degree and are NOT certified
Associate-level clinical laboratory testing personnel who are certified and meet CLIA regulatory requirements for testing personnel	Certified Medical Laboratory Technician	certified Medical Laboratory Technician	cMLT	The “c” denotes certification to distinguish from non-certified individuals.
Associate-level clinical laboratory testing personnel who are NOT certified and meet CLIA regulatory requirements for testing personnel	Medical Laboratory Technician	Medical Laboratory Technician	MLT	

\* This is a workplace definition to differentiate those who are certified/credentialed and those who are not.

## Promoting the Medical Laboratory Science Profession through Standardized Titles

### PROBLEM SUMMARY

In 2019, the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) Board of Certification (BOC) and the American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science adopted a joint position paper titled Standardizing the Professional Title of Medical Laboratory Professionals. The problem statement of that paper identified lack of industry-wide standardization in the title of certified baccalaureate-educated laboratory personnel as confusing and undermining both professional identity of practitioners as well as public understanding of the profession. The position paper recommends using the title “Medical Laboratory Scientist” as the professional title and job title for individuals with a baccalaureate degree and professional certification. The paper also endorses efforts “to find alternate job titles for those with any education and training” other than that combination for individuals defined as clinical laboratory testing personnel by the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments of 1988 (CLIA). This document is intended to address this last point.

Standardizing the nomenclature for medical laboratory professionals, requires consideration of the complexities of the laboratory professions. These include varying levels of academic preparation, specialization at job entry, varying employer prerogatives in establishing job qualifications, the need to comply with state and federal laws, and multiple credentialing agencies.

Nomenclature for medical laboratory personnel must acknowledge that individuals enter laboratory work with different levels of academic preparation that are currently recognized with different credentials e.g., medical laboratory scientist (MLS) and medical laboratory technician (MLT). This is seen in other health professions as well. Associate degree nurses (ADN) and baccalaureate degree nurses (BSN) and physical therapists (PT) and physical therapist assistants (PTA) are two examples. The original position paper addressed only the baccalaureate credentialed title as no issues of confusion were identified relative to the associate degree MLT credential. Thus, the focus of this document is also on the baccalaureate testing personnel.

Few health professions offer specialization at job entry as with the clinical laboratory. It is common for health professionals to specialize after job entry and to gain board certification in that specialty. Physicians, nurses, physician assistants are examples of several. Their nomenclatures begin with the generalist title (physician, nurse, physician assistant) and the specialty is an addition e.g. specializing in cardiology. However, individuals may enter laboratory work in just one department of the medical laboratory (e.g. clinical microbiology) and may gain categorical certification in just that area. Other individuals enter the laboratory as generalists who are qualified by education and their credential to work in all areas of the clinical laboratory. Thus, there is no umbrella title, like nurse, for all individuals doing clinical laboratory work. There is, instead, a collection of entry level professional titles from multiple certifying bodies and extensive variability in job titles unique to individual employers. A standardized nomenclature would be desirable to eliminate the confusions this poses.

Any nomenclature recommendation must be in compliance with the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments of 1988 (CLIA '88) and any state licensing laws. There is no standardization of qualifications across the licensed states. But in most states, non-physician laboratory personnel are not licensed, so CLIA compliance is the only restriction. For most laboratory staff, these federal regulations do not require certification. As a result, employers have substantial leeway to establish their own

eligibility requirements for laboratory positions. Employees who have made the investments necessary to achieve certification are likely to want to have that achievement recognized.

However, in recognizing certification, another parameter that must be acknowledged in a nomenclature for medical laboratory personnel is that there are several certifying bodies for practitioners. The position paper refers only to “a national certification” and would seem to acknowledge this additional factor influencing naming of laboratory personnel.

In summary, the complexities of personnel standards and nomenclature for clinical laboratory testing personnel created by generalist vs categorical practice, employer prerogatives, certified vs uncertified practice, and multiple certifying bodies creates a situation that is currently highly confusing for prospective practitioners, hiring managers and human resource professionals, the public and even current practitioners. Any new nomenclature should aim to simplify and not further complicate this situation.

## PURPOSES

The purposes of this document are to develop a simplified nomenclature for job titles of clinical laboratory testing personnel that can be used to:

- Guide employers in updating and revising job titles for consistency across employers
- Guide educational institutions concerning program and degree titles
- Provide editors, authors, and journalists proper titles of individuals and the profession(s)
- Educate the general health care community
- Guide regulatory agencies including licensing authorities, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and Centers for Medicare/Medicaid Services (CMS)
- Inform in vitro diagnostics manufacturers and their advertisers regarding professional titles

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR NOMENCLATURE DEVELOPMENT

The following principles have been used in the development of this nomenclature for job titles of medical laboratory professionals:

The nomenclature will:

- Simplify the nomenclature of job titles for medical laboratory professionals
- Provide the public and other health professionals an understandable laboratory professional title
- Differentiate certified and non-certified individuals
- Distinguish individuals with different levels of academic preparation, i.e. different levels of practice
- Retain existing credential title
- Be consistent with current state and federal regulations

**What is the appropriate name for the occupation/profession of clinical (i.e. not anatomical) laboratory personnel?**

Formerly, the occupation/profession for clinical laboratory professionals was called medical technology. The encompassing name of the occupation was medical technology and individuals were referred to as medical technologists whether they were certified or not. We propose use of the term “medical laboratory scientist” as the professional job title for those at the baccalaureate level who meet CLIA personnel standards for high complexity testing personnel. Those who are certified would be designated as such, as outlined in the table. The transition away from “medical technologist” to “medical laboratory scientist” as the individual title would suggest that the occupation name also be refreshed for consistency to “medical laboratory science.”

### **What name(s) should be used when talking about the aggregate laboratory workforce?**

- **Medical laboratory profession(als)** - This phrase should be used in most circumstances. The word “professional” typically connotes a level of expertise, adherence to standards of excellence, and ultimate concern for client (i.e. patient) welfare. In its purest usage, it should be applied to certified individuals; that is, individuals who have met the qualifications and personal standards for recognition by a certifying board of their professional peers. Yet, this phrase might be applied to all laboratory personnel, and in doing so, it may heighten the respect accorded even to those who are not certified or formally educated. It includes all individuals performing or managing technical work, both clinical and anatomical, in the medical laboratory including physicians (pathologists) and other doctoral-level personnel. The adjective “non-physician” or “non-doctoral” can be added to narrow the scope when appropriate. Other adjectives can be added if pertinent to the context such as “baccalaureate-level”, “clinical”, “anatomical”, or “non-certified”.
- **Medical laboratory personnel** – is a fully encompassing phrase which does not connote any level of professionalization of the people working in laboratories and does not distinguish among the various specialties and levels of practice. This may be appropriate in circumstances where such distinctions are not needed. Adjectives can be used as above. Medical laboratory workers or workforce or staff are phrases that are synonymous with medical laboratory personnel and may be appropriate in certain contexts.

### **Phrases to be avoided in the aggregate or for individuals.**

- *Lab techs/Lab technicians/Bench tech* – these phrases are shortened forms of longer and often outdated titles. As there are many types of laboratories, this phrase does not denote a medical orientation of the work, unless by context. The terms could be applied to individuals working in research or even computer applications.
- *Medical technologist/Medical technology/Med tech/Bench tech*– these phrases denote outdated terminology as “medical technology” has come to commonly mean any use of technology in medicine. Some certifying bodies retain this terminology, so within that specific context the title “Medical Technologist” should be used. However, the occupation as a whole should no longer be called Medical Technology.
- *Clinical Laboratory Scientist/CLS* –very similar to medical laboratory scientist, but this certification is no longer available. Those with this certification have had their professional designation changed to MLS. Although this title is used for the degree conferred by many academic institutions, a goal of this endeavor is to guide those programs to adopt medical laboratory science as the program name.

- *Medical laboratorians* – this phrase has the convenience of being a shorter phrase. While it has some usage among medical laboratory professionals, it is more of a laboratory patois or jargon and as such is used most often in speaking to one another. Since it carries no implication of certification or level of practice, it is more synonymous with medical laboratory personnel.
- *Lab rat* – this phrase sometimes appears in memes and crafts. While some consider it to be humorous or cute, the implication that medical laboratory personnel are experimental animals is undignified. This phrase should never be used.

**What job titles are recommended?**

In recommending job titles, it is important to acknowledge that job titles ARE NOT professional credentials even when they are the same words. Employers develop job descriptions with titles that distinguish the responsibilities and qualifications of staff in different positions. A credential such as certification or licensing may be a qualification for a job.

Brief job description	Common title for individuals	Proposed job title	Abbreviation that may be used on badges	Comments
Baccalaureate-level clinical laboratory testing personnel who are certified and meet CLIA regulatory requirements for testing personnel	Medical laboratory scientist/Medical technologist/Clinical laboratory scientist	certified medical laboratory scientist –	cMLS	The “c” denotes certification to distinguish from non-certified individuals. The certifying agency is not indicated so someone certified as Medical Technologist by agencies such as AMT would still be cMLS in job title if they hold a bachelor’s degree as well as certification. Categorical practitioners would be included here if they have at least a BS degree and are certified.
Baccalaureate-level clinical laboratory testing personnel who are NOT certified and meet CLIA regulatory requirements for testing personnel	Medical laboratory scientist/Medical technologist/Clinical laboratory scientist	medical laboratory scientist	MLS	Non-certified baccalaureate-educated individuals performing the job tasks of certified MLS. Categorical practitioners would be included here if they have at least a BS degree and are NOT certified

Associate-level clinical laboratory testing personnel who are certified and meet CLIA regulatory requirements for testing personnel	Certified medical laboratory technician	certified medical laboratory technician	cMLT	The “c” denotes certification to distinguish from non-certified individuals.
Associate-level clinical laboratory testing personnel who are NOT certified and meet CLIA regulatory requirements for testing personnel	medical laboratory technician	medical laboratory technician	MLT	

**Rationale for recommendations**

The recommendations provided here achieve the guiding principles.

The nomenclature will:

- Acknowledge the complexities outlined above and yet simplify the nomenclature of medical laboratory professionals, with an aim to help the public and other health professionals understand the work we do

This goal is accomplished by the use of the job title “medical laboratory scientist” for all baccalaureate-prepared clinical laboratory testing personnel MLS-level job responsibilities, whether practicing as a generalist or in a specific department such as microbiology. The recommendation consolidates testing personnel who are trained and/or certified in limited laboratory department(s) with generalist personnel based on equivalent job performance expectations, though those with specific department expertise have restricted scope of practice. Generalist certification versus those with expertise in a specific area is not an important distinction to non-laboratory audiences like journalists, practitioners, and patients. Their concern is that the individuals are qualified to perform their assigned responsibilities. Consolidating generalists and personnel with limited training and/or certification within a single title addresses that concern while simplifying the nomenclature.

- Distinguish certified and non-certified individuals

The recommended “c” designation in a JOB title accomplishes this; it denotes a certified professional. It provides recognition for the investments made to achieve certification. It does not distinguish certification agencies, however, to retain simplicity for non-laboratory audiences. Employers may still indicate agency preferences in hiring. As an example, an individual certified by the ASCP Board of Certification but another certified by American Medical Technologists would both have the job designation of cMLS.

- Distinguish individuals with different levels of academic preparation, i.e., different levels of practice

Retaining the distinction between MLS and MLT accomplishes this. The position paper noted that MLT title did not have the same level of confusion associated with baccalaureate-level titles. Thus, retaining the MLT is expected to maintain the clarity that already exists for this level of practice.

- To the highest degree possible, retain existing credential titles

This document builds on the position paper that recommended adoption of MLS for individuals with baccalaureate preparation and whose job descriptions are consistent with that expected level of performance. No new designations are proposed here, so that simplicity is maintained.

- Be consistent with CLIA (not contrary to CLIA)

The coordination of job descriptions with qualifications by employers must ensure CLIA compliance.