

## The Medical Laboratory Scientists Workforce The Start of a Change Movement #2: Focus on Information and Intelligence.

12 February 2018

Dear Colleagues

Do you remember the newsletter of 16 January and our promise that more would be coming? Well here we are! In case you don't entirely recall, we attach a copy of the previous newsletter to help.

So did we hit the mark? Do you accept that change is upon us – like now? Just to refresh what that means in a visual sense...

Before



And now...



Workforces are all too often viewed from a static point of view: numbers in position, vacancies, turnover, compliment, demographic structure and “demand met”. Waiting until demand is upon us and we are not coping forcing a business case to be approved is the more likely current mode of operation, leaving scant consideration to getting ahead of impending demand let alone changes in technology and models of care.

In highly technological industries such as ours, what the future looks like, what transitioning of workforces may be required, what current skill sets and knowledge we wish to retain and grow as well as planning for adaptability, rarely feature: succession planning in all but the smallest of specialties, and proactive workforce (re)training even less so.

**We know what we have now, we know what technology is coming and now need to focus on developing laboratory scientists to better support future services that will deliver to health imperatives.** Rather than reacting to change we wish to assist you to prepare for change.

Our focus is broader than treatment and care including such things as:

- ✓ using laboratory information to support the efficient planning and commissioning of health services for populations.
- ✓ informing investment in new health technology and procedures.
- ✓ the protection of society from harm associated with communicable diseases.
- ✓ the early detection and screening of disease.
- ✓ ensuring that systems, processes and practices are in place to provide assurance to the health service about the quality of laboratory and pathology information.

To achieve all of this we need future focused training to be a normal part of the laboratory business, ensuring the workforce is not just maintaining knowledge and skill but is prepared to drive value added change. We need to retain the knowledge and skills we have but also receive support to adapt to changing needs: less cytologists, more histologists, more laboratory service communicators and point of care support staff. But how?

### **Our focus today is on ... Information and Intelligence**

How we manage laboratory systems, make sense of data and work “outside the laboratory” will be at least equally important components of the value laboratories can provide as clinical results. Improving connectivity with whole of health and end to end planning will be critical. Laboratory navigators and communicators with not just doctors, but patients, pharmacists, family.... will be important for both the success of the laboratory(s), but also the resources and knowledge we hold.

Our system is often described as data rich but information poor: we hold a significant amount of data, both about and for individual patient care through to the population level. **Turning this data into information and intelligence for patients, clinicians and the system, and communicating that information effectively and efficiently is a key requirement of laboratory services.**

The sheer volume of information will mandate better demand management systems as will increasing expectation around TAT. But TAT is no longer the time between taking the sample and producing the result. It is increasingly being seen as from the time between first thinking about the test and clinicians / patients acting on the result, which gives opportunity to add value from what laboratories do. It will be critical in getting the right test “thought about” in the first instance through to “what it means”. And given that the customer will increasingly be the patient, mechanisms to communicate at this level will be mandated.

Information is a key strength and resource that will add value to the future of patient centric care: **demand for scientists to increasingly work in the data/information, quality, clinical engagement space is already apparent.** Patient portals are already in operation giving patients access to their test results directly: we must be ready to meet that increasing demand.

### **What do you think we need to do as a system to help you thrive in this space?**

It has already been suggested that universities will need to ensure communication skills and IT interface knowledge is a core component of laboratory training. But just training at uni level will not cope with this issue as much of this work is needed from early - mid career scientists.

Are you interested in upskilling in this area? How many of you would be interested if this option was made available? And what does that actually mean to you in real terms?

It is said that Future Focused Training will need to equip current staff with effective communication skills as well as how to manage information rich resources to support clinical and population based decision making. Do you agree and again, what does that look like to you?

In addition new ways of communicating will be required. As examples:

- Laboratory results will need a redesign if patients are to make best use of this information directly.
- Information portals and access points for patients (live chat, free phone, email, website information etc.) need to be established/improved.

Again we are seeking your feedback including your level of interest in this work and what you need to make it happen. Talk to your delegates or email us here at [secretary@apex.org.nz](mailto:secretary@apex.org.nz).