



Enhanced Professionalism

Responding to the evolving needs of
the public and the health care system.

36 TORONTO STREET SUITE 950
TORONTO ONTARIO M5C 2C5
T 416 861 9605 1 800 323 9672 F 416 861 0934
www.cmlto.com

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Excellence and accountability are hallmarks
of the self-regulated MLT profession.





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Introduction

The College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Ontario (CMLTO) is the regulatory body for the province's 7700 medical laboratory technologists (MLT). Like nurses, doctors, dentists, physiotherapists and 18 other health care professions, MLTs are regulated under Ontario's *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991*. Regulatory Colleges, such as the CMLTO, exist to protect the public interest and ensure the highest standards of medical care through regulation of these professions.

This position paper is a result of four years of consultation with medical laboratory technologists and stakeholders. **Its goal is to define the components of enhanced professionalism, highlight its importance in support of the evolution of the health care system, and present a case for the collaborative efforts of stakeholders in the profession to assist in this transformation.**

As a result of changes in the health care system, patient expectations of health care professionals have also evolved. Professionals need to develop new competencies in response to these changing expectations (Blackmer, 2007). In addition to the evolving expectations of patients, the health care system experiences many other pressures (HPRAC, 2008). Regardless of system pressures, the public must be confident that they will receive the most appropriate care, delivered by the most competent health care professionals. In other words, the public expects that professionals will demonstrate professionalism at all times, regardless of the situation, to meet the changing needs of patients (ABIM Foundation, 2002).



CMLTO's role includes a legislated requirement to promote the ability of members to respond to changes in the health care system, such as the expectation of interprofessional collaboration, now and in the future. **The government, the health care system and health care consumers expect the most appropriate care to be provided by the most appropriate health care professional at the most appropriate time, and in the right place.** In Ontario, common principles of interprofessional collaboration have been produced by the Federation of Health Regulatory Colleges of Ontario (FHRCO). These principles are meant to help guide the evolving professional practice of regulated health professionals to meet the needs and expectations of the health care system (College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Ontario, 2011).

The health care system is dynamic. Innovations that aim to improve patient care require an evolution of the system and its professionals.

Interprofessional collaboration is grounded in the notion that each member of the health care team offers a unique value to positive patient outcomes. It is widely accepted that patient care is improved when health care professionals work together (World Health Organization, 2010). Through discussion with the CMLTO, MLTs report instances in which they have contributed to improved patient care by demonstrating enhanced professionalism through an application of their unique expertise with the health care team.

Redefining Professionalism

Currently, the CMLTO's *Code of Ethics* and *Standards of Practice* form the foundation of an MLT's professionalism. All new graduates of MLT programs in Ontario are educated and assessed on professional behaviours through the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science (CSMLS) certification process as professionalism is one of the eleven competencies expected of an entry-level MLT (CSMLS, 2010). The medical



laboratory technology profession can build upon this foundation and embrace the opportunity to enhance professionalism to continue improving patient care.

Enhanced professionalism relates to the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours of MLTs that will support the evolving needs of the public and the health care system.

Enhanced professionalism is demonstrated by the individual behaviours of MLTs, which the public and other members of the health care team experience as the culture of the profession. Behavioural and cultural socialization within a profession occurs through:

- Initial education,
- Modeling professional behaviours, and integrating these behaviours into the professional practice, and
- Ongoing professional growth and development.

Behavioural and cultural socialization can support or jeopardize the development of enhanced professional competencies (American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Council of Deans Task Force on Professionalism, 2000; Purkerson Hammer, 2000). As the health care system and the needs of patients evolve, enhanced professional competencies need to be developed, integrated and demonstrated in professional practice (World Health Organization, 2010).



Enhanced professionalism is an important component of the medical laboratory technologist's ability to support the evolving needs of the public and the health care system.





Enhanced Professionalism

Through a variety of presentations and focus group sessions, from 2008 to 2010, the CMLTO learned about changes in the health care system that affect the MLT's professional practice. These discussions suggested the need to revisit the role of the MLT in the health care system, and the College's definition of professionalism.

CMLTO publicly released *Medical Laboratory Technologists: Empowering Enhanced Professionalism White Paper* on April 15, 2010. It formed the basis for a series of member relations linkage sessions in 2010 and 2011, through which the CMLTO discussed enhanced professionalism with over 550 medical laboratory technologists. The discussions centered on the impact of enhanced professionalism on patient care, as defined in the White Paper, and the enablers and barriers to empowering supportive behaviours.

The CMLTO learned that the profession as a whole and individual MLTs require support to develop the behaviours and culture that define an enhanced professionalism. The concept of 'interprofessional professionalism' has also emerged in an attempt to define aspects that are shared across professions (Holtman, 2011). However, the unique opportunity for the medical laboratory technology profession and MLTs to evolve to meet the needs of a changing health care system and patient expectations were highlighted through discussions between the CMLTO and MLTs.



The Profession

The medical laboratory technology profession has a long history of contributing to safe and effective health care delivery, and has been a regulated profession in Ontario for nearly 20 years. Over this time, the public and other practitioners have perceived the value that MLTs add to the health care system. This 'professional culture' can be either an enabler or a barrier to the ability of the profession to respond to the changing needs of patient care (Hall, 2005). **In response to the current needs of the health care system, a professional culture shift is required.** The profession needs to actively pursue opportunities to contribute to the evolution of the health care system. To achieve this goal, the profession can:

- **Demonstrate its value and its impact on patient care.**
- **Increase its collective contribution to positive health outcomes.**
- **Share knowledge and expertise with other health professionals.**

Initiatives that support these three directions are about enabling an understanding and an application of the value the profession adds to positive patient and system outcomes.

The greater capacity a profession has to understand its unique value to patient care through an application of its professional identity and culture, the greater the ability to contribute this value in an interprofessional collaborative team (Jakobsen, 2011).



The Professionals

Just as professional identity and culture can contribute positively to team based patient care, so can an individual MLT's professional behaviours (Marshall, 2011). Medical laboratory test results are an integral part of the provision of safe and effective patient care. The process of obtaining a laboratory result is complex and extensive. **An MLT's ability to participate as part of the health care team, throughout the entire patient journey is an important component of effective patient care.**

MLTs inherently demonstrate professional behaviours due to their unique knowledge, advanced education and skills. Other health professionals value MLTs' contributions which improves MLTs' self-perceptions. Currently, the CMLTO provides guidance to MLTs related to key professional behaviours that support interprofessional collaboration through the 'Professionalism and Collaboration' Professional Practice Learning Program module (College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Ontario, 2009). Additionally, to support the evolving expectations of patients and the health care system, MLTs professional behaviours need to include the ability to:

- **Focus on accountability and excellence.**
- **Articulate impact on patient care clearly and concisely.**
- **Apply and share quality management principles and a process-oriented approach to the health care system.**
- **Develop competencies that support collaboration.**
- **Mentor peers and other members of the health care team.**

Expanding current professional behaviours will empower MLTs to share their knowledge and expertise with other health professionals, leading to improved patient care.



Enhanced Professionalism

Desired Outcome	Rationale	What the Profession Can Do (Cultural Change)	What the Professional Can Do (Behavioural Change)
<p>Increase awareness and understanding by the public and other health care practitioners of the impact the profession has on patient care.</p>	<p>Application of the profession's knowledge and skills to the health care system and the health care team will contribute to more effective patient care.</p>	<p>Demonstrate its value and its impact on patient care.</p>	<p>Articulate impact on patient care clearly and concisely.</p>
<p>Development, support and application of professional, non-technical competencies.</p>	<p>Effective collaboration will ensure that the profession effectively responds to the evolving needs of the public and the health care system.</p>	<p>Increase its collective contribution to positive health outcomes.</p>	<p>Continue to focus on accountability and excellence.</p> <p>Develop competencies that support effective collaboration.</p>
<p>Take initiative to innovate and support changes in the health care system.</p>	<p>Unique non-technical knowledge and skills (such as a process-oriented approach to health care service delivery and a thorough understanding of quality systems) add value to the health care system.</p>	<p>Share knowledge and expertise with other health professionals.</p>	<p>Apply and share quality management principles and a process-oriented approach to the health care system.</p> <p>Mentor peers and other members of the health care team.</p>

The application of MLTs' unique knowledge makes a significant impact on the provision of safe, effective, high-quality laboratory services and health care to the public.





Stakeholder Roles

Discussion between the CMLTO and MLTs indicated that the profession and the individual MLT will require support to evolve towards an enhanced professionalism in response to the evolving needs of the public and the health care system. This is defined by a culture shift for the profession and the development of enhanced professional behaviours for the MLT.

It became clear from these discussions that all stakeholder groups involved in the medical laboratory technology profession including educational institutions, professional organizations, employers and, most importantly, the MLTs themselves must actively contribute to the development of an enhanced professionalism. The CMLTO can champion the aspects of professionalism that relate directly to its mandate as a health regulatory College, and share MLTs' opinions with stakeholders and partners who play their own unique roles in advancing an enhanced professionalism. Clearly, no single initiative from any one stakeholder will be able to change the culture of the profession, or the professional behaviours of MLTs.

From a common frame of reference, namely excellence in patient care, a wide variety of stakeholders, each with their own specific mandate, can contribute to empowering enhanced professionalism collaboratively.

The tools and initiatives that will support an enhanced professionalism are varied and work best when utilized concurrently, and in the context that they will be applied (Sylvia, 2004). **In reality, a collaborative approach is required to respond to this opportunity for transformational change.** Stakeholders can work collaboratively to



support the ability of the medical laboratory profession and the individual MLT to respond to this opportunity for positive change by:

- **Contextualizing** the information presented in this position paper so that initiatives that are undertaken are in line with the stakeholders' own unique mandate and role in the profession,
- **Committing** to initiatives that support a cultural and behavioural evolution in response to the evolving needs of the public and the health care system, and
- **Championing** those initiatives in collaboration with other stakeholders (World Health Organization, 2010).





Conclusion

Shifting a profession's culture and influencing professional behaviours is not a simple undertaking, and is one that is anticipated to take many years. However, this is clearly what the CMLTO has heard from MLTs and stakeholders is necessary in order to respond to the evolving expectations of patients and health care system needs.

The first phase of the Empowering Enhanced Professionalism initiative described and supported changes to established professional behaviours by presenting the information in the White Paper to as many MLTs as possible, and engaging in conversation with MLTs related to their specific experience with enhanced professionalism. The culmination of the feedback received through these discussions appears here in this position paper in the form of key directions for the medical laboratory technology profession and for the individual MLT to meet the needs of patients and the health care system.

The contribution of all stakeholders, including educational institutions, professional organizations, employers and, most importantly, individual MLTs, is required to support and facilitate the emergence of an enhanced professionalism. Through this collective action, in accordance with each stakeholder's unique role and mandate, MLTs will continue to maximize their contributions to the health care system, leading to improved patient care.

For further information on the Empowering Enhanced Professionalism initiative, and the role of the CMLTO, please feel free to contact Kathy Wilkie, Registrar & Executive Director at kwilkie@cmlto.com or John Tzountzouris, Member Relations & Policy Specialist at jtzountzouris@cmlto.com.



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