



Guidelines for supervision

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Introduction

As one of Ontario's self-regulated health professions, medical laboratory technologists (MLTs) are regulated by the College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Ontario (CMLTO). The *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991* (RHPA), defines CMLTO's mandate to protect the public's right to safe, competent, and ethical healthcare.

The *Medical Laboratory Technology Act, 1991* (MLT Act), and its regulations define the profession's scope of practice, the controlled acts that are authorized to the profession, as well as MLTs' legal obligations.

Ontario Regulation 752/93 ("Professional Misconduct"), made under the MLT Act, includes the following definition of professional misconduct:

18. Failing to properly supervise a person who provides a service and who is under the authority or direction of the member.

Several other clauses in the same Regulation also have implications for MLTs serving as supervisors. It is essential to clarify the general expectations for MLTs performing supervisory roles.

The nature of supervision

Supervision, in the context of an MLT's professional practice, is the act of monitoring and directing another individual's professional practice to ensure the provision of safe, high-quality laboratory services by the individual being supervised, in accordance with laws and institutional policies and procedures.

Supervision is undertaken in accordance with the professional expectations of practice (e.g., legal obligations, Standards of Practice, and Code of Ethics). Supervisors assume professional responsibility for those whom they supervise and can expect to be held accountable for the work done by people under their supervision.

Supervision may take one of two forms:



- a) "Direct" supervision entails telling the supervised person what to do and how to do it. The supervisor continuously monitors performance and is always readily accessible in case of difficulty or needed intervention. Direct supervision need not, however, mean constant observation, although a supervisor should use direct observation until a judgment about competence is made.
- b) "Indirect" supervision entails ensuring that the supervised person understands the work to be done or the results to be achieved. The supervisor occasionally monitors performance, but more typically leaves the person supervised to seek assistance as required.

Factors affecting the nature of supervision

Either "direct" or "indirect" supervision may be appropriate in different circumstances at the supervisor's discretion. The nature of supervision must take into account many factors, such as:

- the work being done, and risk of error
- the knowledge, skill, and judgement of the person being supervised
- the environment in which the person is being supervised
- the training and competence requirements defined by an institution or facility, in accordance with external accreditation requirements.

A supervisor may shift between providing "direct" and "indirect" supervision, as any of these factors change, or as the person being supervised demonstrates the need for greater supervision, or greater competence.

Supervisory situations

CMLTO understands that supervisory roles are performed in different situations, which include supervising:

- a) MLTs who hold a Practising certificate of registration with specified terms, conditions, and limitations
- b) MLTs who hold an Emergency certificate of registration
- c) Other regulated health professionals



- d) Unregulated practitioners
- a) MLT students

While the CMLTO *Guidelines for supervision* apply to each of these situations, a few other factors may affect, and support, an MLT acting as a supervisor.

In some cases, MLTs may act as a supervisor to another Practising MLT as a result of a CMLTO Registration Committee decision. In addition to the CMLTO *Guidelines for supervision*, MLTs in this situation should follow the direction that the CMLTO provides.

CMLTO registrants who supervise MLT students for any period of time are responsible for all patient/client services provided by the students and are expected to adhere to the CMLTO *Guidelines for supervision*, the CMLTO *Guidelines for the clinical supervision of medical laboratory science program students*, and the expectations of the educational institutions.

Finally, supervising others is supported by a collaborative approach. The CMLTO *Collaboration Guidelines for Medical Laboratory Technologists* outline some enablers and barriers to collaboration that are contextual to an MLT's professional culture. These guidelines support MLTs currently involved in collaborative practice and can also be applied to the relationship between an MLT acting as a supervisor, and the individual they are supervising.

Delegating controlled acts

Delegation is a process whereby a regulated health professional, who is authorized to perform a controlled act procedure, confers that authority on an individual who is not otherwise authorized. Through the process of supervision, an MLT may be required to delegate the controlled act authorized to medical laboratory technologists as defined in the *Medical Laboratory Technology Act, 1991*, as follows:

4. In the course of engaging in the practice of medical laboratory technology, a member is authorized, subject to the terms, conditions and limitations imposed on his or her certificate of registration, to take blood samples from veins or by skin pricking. 1991, c. 28, s. 4.



MLTs in supervisory roles who delegate a controlled act are urged to review CMLTO's resources related to the delegation of controlled acts, prior to engaging in the delegation.

Supervisory responsibilities

Regardless of the nature of the supervision, MLTs undertaking supervisory responsibilities must meet certain expectations. Supervisors must:

- ensure that their own professional expertise and supervisory abilities are adequate for their responsibilities
- demonstrate effective collaborative skills to establish a supportive and professional relationship with the individual being supervised to facilitate the educational and supervision process
- assess the person's training and experience before determining what tasks may be assigned
- understand, explain, and demonstrate the work to be done and relevant standards, objectives and procedures (e.g., safety, quality control), before permitting the person to perform the work
- ensure that the person receives an appropriate orientation to the facility and its procedures
- evaluate continually, the person's competence and determine the type of supervision required
- remain aware of any tasks the person being supervised is performing
- provide ongoing guidance and monitoring as required, or, in the case of an extended absence, arrange substitute supervision
- intervene appropriately when the supervisor becomes aware of a concern about the person's performance
- ensure that the person being supervised uses an appropriate title when dealing with members of the public, other members of the healthcare team or colleagues at the facility



- ensure the person being supervised performs appropriate record-keeping
- verify results in accordance with the pre-established standards or objectives
- provide feedback to the person being supervised concerning overall performance and areas for future professional development.

An MLT who feels unqualified to meet any of the above expectations should document their concerns and should not undertake the supervisory assignment until appropriate training or upgrading has been obtained. Similarly, if circumstances (such as inadequate time) make it impossible for an MLT to meet the above expectations, the MLT should not undertake the supervisory assignment.

Conclusion

MLTs involved in supervision assume professional responsibility for those whom they supervise and can expect to be held accountable for the work of people under their supervision.

In conjunction with the CMLTO Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics, and other CMLTO Practice Guidelines, this document supports, but does not replace, the professional judgment of MLTs involved in supervision.

The CMLTO is available to provide guidance to registrants involved in supervision, consistent with the RHPA, the MLT Act and Regulations.

If you have questions about this document, or about MLTs' professional, legal, or ethical obligations, please contact the CMLTO by email at registrantrelations@cmlto.com.