



April 16, 2008

Dear:

People around the world learned of the dangers of extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB) when Atlanta attorney Andrew Speaker exposed hundreds of airline passengers to the virulent bacterium on a U.S. flight bound for Europe. What *didn't* gain international media attention was the drug-resistant TB outbreak averted weeks later thanks to the quick response of laboratory professionals in Massachusetts, when a young woman's TB transformed to multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB). Although the woman was scheduled to travel on a transcontinental flight within 24 hours, a fast-thinking lab team convinced her to delay her travel and provided the information needed to readjust her medications. The young woman recovered and potential health crises were averted – because of laboratory professionals.

This is just one example of the critical role lab professionals serve in our healthcare system – from diagnosis, to treatment, to disease monitoring. While these unsung healthcare heroes may not draw as much attention as nurses because of their minimal patient interaction, **every day laboratory professionals provide the vital information that saves lives, reduces morbidity, and helps control the cost of care in thousands of hospitals.**

Honoring these unsung heroes is the reason for our letter to you today. This year marks the 33<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of **National Medical Laboratory Professionals Week (NMLPW)**, which was created to celebrate the contributions of laboratory professionals within the medical community, and to recognize their indispensable work on behalf of patients. **This year NMLPW takes place April 20-26.**

**Laboratorians' work is a foundational element of much evidence-based medicine** and enables other healthcare workers, such as clinicians, to perform their jobs more successfully. Yet the laboratorian workforce shortage continues to worsen. Vacancy rates for essential laboratory staff positions continue to increase and nearly half (45%) of labs in the U.S. report experiencing difficulties hiring new personnel. The number of professionals graduating with clinical laboratory science and technician degrees has dropped significantly while the mean age of laboratory professionals is near 50. Recently, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, using 2006 data, predicted that **10,000 new clinical laboratory scientists and technicians are needed per year over the next ten years, but less than 5,000 are graduating from laboratory science programs annually.**

**We encourage you to take National Medical Laboratory Professionals Week as an opportunity to celebrate your laboratory staff** that each day quietly impacts the quality of patient care and helps control healthcare costs in your institution. There are many meaningful and appropriate ways to express your gratitude. For example, you might consider scheduling a visit to your facility's clinical laboratory or writing a tribute to your laboratory staff for publication in your organization's newsletter. Your gesture in recognizing their life- and cost-saving contributions, however large or small, certainly will not go unnoticed.

Sincerely,

***The 2008 Lab Week Sponsoring Organizations***

**AABB**

**AACC** (American Association for Clinical Chemistry)

**AMT** (American Medical Technologists)

**APHL** (Association of Public Health Laboratories)

**ASCLS** (American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science)

**ASC** (American Society of Cytopathology)

**ASCP** (American Society for Clinical Pathology)

**CAP** (College of American Pathologists)

**CLMA** (Clinical Laboratory Management Association)

**NSH** (National Society for Histotechnology)