

2009 Amerinet Member Conference
Laboratory Leadership Council

Present at this council meeting were laboratory members from many parts of the United States, representing hospitals and clinics of all sizes. The discussions were varied and gave insight into the range of experiences, challenges, and insights we all have. The Amerinet staff (Bob Baglini, Chris Kozlowski, and Ann Tullis) were very understanding of our issues and I know ~~this~~ ^{they} will address the members' needs. Amerinet staff everywhere are an excellent "resource" for help and information.

The discussions were lively and ranged from capital equipment to phlebotomy issues to how to access grant money. One of the members suggested that Amerinet offer an Inquisit program to give members insight into the subject of grant money access. The discussion on molecular testing was very interesting since we had just had a general session on this subject given by Robert Michel (Editor in Chief of The Dark Report). Many concerns were expressed including 1) that molecular testing eventually would be done only by reference labs, 2) the need for "fresh tissue" may mean that patients would be transported away from the local hospital, and 3) a large hurdle would be getting pathologists and radiologist at the same table.

The challenges that each of our facilities face in 2009 are great, but a common theme exists: revenue/ budgetary concerns as well as shortages of MLTs and MTs. In addition, the retiring baby boomers mean that the number of tests requested should begin to increase, as should the development of new tests. For example, vitamin D testing has increased dramatically and may be an area we all should look at. Another area with challenges is the potential melding of the laboratory LIS with the future requirements of an EMR. There are many systems out there, and all departments need to be involved in the decision process.

A very interesting question discussed is how our facilities and laboratories are addressing MRSA identification, treatment, and prevention. Some do no screening now and have no protocols, but are looking at the issue via an infection control committee. For others, how testing is done ranges from conventional culture to MRSA-select media to automation such as Cepheid or GeneOhm.

Other subjects briefly discussed were 1) indicators for tracking and improving patient care and the role laboratory is playing in this, 2) role of evolving informatics in delivering lab results, and 3) evaluation of niche vendors and/or technology.

The general sessions for laboratory were well attended, and the subject matter and speakers were excellent. Robert Michel (Editor in Chief of The Dark Report) presented two sessions. The first session was New Threats and Opportunities for Clinical Laboratories: This session reviewed political trends that are reshaping healthcare and how laboratory services must evolve/change to effectively support these new healthcare objectives and needs. Labs must identify specific opportunities to deliver value to physicians, patients, and payers. Some interesting thoughts are a) a lab test result delivered on paper will soon be an impediment to superior healthcare, b) laboratories that add value to clinicians will be paid extra for that value, and 3) lab winners will be extensive users of IT and savvy and innovative in deploying IT.

The second session was Anticipating How Molecular Imaging and Molecular Diagnostics Will Pave the Way to Personalized Medicine: This session addressed how genetic medicine will reshape the traditional specialties of radiology, pathology, and laboratory medicine. These specialties are on a path to become an integrated and consultative clinical service.

This is not theory, but is instead just beginning to become reality in places like UCLA and the University of Kansas. The many modalities of how to integrate molecular imaging and molecular diagnostics were presented. These are very "high tech" concepts but very intriguing.

A third session was The Management of Clinical Services Improvement When Focused on Expense Reduction: This session discussed cost-containment and reduction requirements in the face of increasing competitive influences. This creates opportunities for well-validated quality management strategies routinely used in many business sectors. Facilities must find new efficiencies in service delivery, while further reducing expenses. Basic LEAN and Six Sigma concepts were introduced. An interesting quote: "Eighty-five percent of the reasons for failure to meet customer requirements are related to deficiencies in systems and processes...rather than the employee. The role of management is to change the process rather than badgering individuals to do better."

Overall, the conference was excellent. Amerinet should be commended for the terrific work they do in lowering healthcare costs. I have a greater appreciation for them as a "resource". I would also like to thank the many vendors for their attendance and time given to all members of Amerinet.

Rick Tello
Leadership Council