



Position Statement
State Licensure of Laboratory Personnel
Approved by the Association of Genetic Technologists Board of Directors
June 2011

Position Statement:

The Association of Genetic Technologists (AGT) believes that states should license genetic laboratory personnel, and that state licensure legislation should ensure that genetic laboratory personnel possess appropriate academic and clinical training, pass competency-based examinations conducted by an approved national certification organization, and participate in continuing education programs.

Background and Rationale:

Clinical laboratory services are a vital component of health care. The genetic laboratory professional provides information that impacts disease diagnosis, clinical treatment, long term patient management, health status, and many other aspects of health care. It is imperative that laboratory test results provided be accurate and timely; such results require professional competence. A licensure and certification process can help assure quality laboratory testing is performed by qualified personnel and protect the public from substandard laboratory services.

Several mechanisms exist to verify the competency of many professionals. They are licensure, certification, title protection, and registration. Most other health care professionals, i.e. physicians, nurses, radiologic technologists, pharmacists, etc. have instituted state licensing statutes to assure the competency of practitioners in their field. As the professional organization representing genetic laboratory professionals, AGT supports the concept of licensure as the best mechanism to assure that clinical genetic laboratory services are provided by qualified competent laboratory personnel.

AGT supports genetic laboratory personnel standards that incorporate certification, licensure, and practice requirements. These standards include the following: an appropriate academic degree; acceptable clinical training or work experience; passage of an examination offered by an approved national certification organization; and appropriate continuing competency standards.

Justification for Licensure of Laboratory Personnel:

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) regulates laboratory testing, with the exception of research, performed on patients in the United States through the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA). CLIA provides a number of important patient protections, such as laboratory personnel standards, proficiency testing, and quality assessment and control requirements.

The personnel standards required by CLIA address only the minimal requirements, and AGT believes these are insufficient to fully protect patient and public health. For example, CLIA requires only an Associate degree and minimal laboratory training to perform tests of high complexity. Furthermore, the complexity of new test requirements, especially for genetic and molecular testing, is increasing and renders these standards insufficient. State licensure laws can and should provide higher standards. The adoption of higher standards will ensure that patient and public health are better protected.

Components of Genetic Laboratory Personnel Licensure Laws:

In order to ensure that state licensure programs will set appropriate standards for genetic laboratory services, certain key elements must be included in state laws or legislation to license genetic laboratory personnel.

Academic Education and Clinical Training

The overall competence of genetic laboratory professionals is strongly influenced by the amount of academic education and training they possess. It is the recommendation of AGT that genetic technologists possess a baccalaureate degree and successfully complete an accredited training program or specified laboratory work experience.

Certification

Licensure programs should require genetic technologists to pass a competency-based national certification examination, such as that provided by the American Society for Clinical Pathology Board of Certification.

Grandfather Provisions

Genetic laboratory personnel licensure bills should include “grandfathering provisions” to allow individuals who hold relevant certifications, and who have maintained their credential through demonstration of active continuing education, to continue working at their current professional level.

Continuing Education

A continuing education requirement should be included in state licensure laws as a component of licensure renewal.

Scope of Practice

State licensure laws must define the scope of practice for genetic laboratory professionals as this provides an opportunity to reaffirm the scope of practice for these professionals and to ensure adequate personnel standards and protection of patient safety and health.

REFERENCES

American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science, Position Paper: Laboratory Personnel Licensure, July 2006.

American Society for Clinical Pathology, Policy Statement: State Licensure of Laboratory Personnel (Policy Number 05-02).