Medical Lab Assistant

All laboratory professionals, including Medical Technologists, Medical Laboratory Technicians and Medical Laboratory Assistants have long played a vital role in the diagnosis and prevention of disease.

Nature of the Work
A Medical Laboratory Assistant is a health care practitioner qualified by education, experience, and examination to assist in the performance of routine laboratory testing. This multi-skilled practitioner performs, or assists in performing, clinical laboratory tasks as regulated by law, administrative tasks, and select tasks involving patient contact. Quality improvement, safety, procedural accuracy, and knowledge of regulatory practice standards are defining aspects of this practitioner’s role. Phlebotomy Technicians must like challenge and responsibility. They must be accurate, work well under pressure and communicate effectively. They must be able to deal with patients and be able to calm patients. Safety is key and all safety precautions must be taken to prevent the transmission of infectious diseases.

Education and Training
Many Medical Laboratory Assistants learn their skills on the job. However, some do go through a formal training Program. Nationally recognized agencies that accredit Medical Laboratory Assistant programs include the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) and the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES).

Licenses: Some states require Medical Laboratory Assistants to be licensed or registered. Information on licensure is available from state departments of health or boards of occupational licensing.

Certification: Although not required, some employers prefer applicants who are certified by a recognized professional association, such as the American Medical Technologists.

Other Skills: Employers seek Medical Laboratory Assistants with good analytical judgment and the ability to work under pressure. Close attention to detail is also essential for laboratory personnel because small differences or changes in test substances or numerical readouts can be crucial to a diagnosis. Manual dexterity and normal color vision are highly desirable, and with the widespread use of automated laboratory equipment, computer skills are important.
Advancement: Medical Laboratory Assistants can advance and become technicians or technologists through additional education and experience. Technologists may advance to supervisory positions in laboratory work or may become chief technologists or laboratory managers in hospitals. Manufacturers of home diagnostic testing kits and laboratory equipment and supplies also seek experienced technologists to work in product development, marketing, and sales. Professional certification, specialization and/or a graduate degree in medical technology, one of the biological sciences, chemistry, management, or education usually speeds advancement.

Employment
Medical Laboratory Assistants work in a variety of different settings, including hospitals, independent reference laboratories and in offices of physicians.

Rapid job growth and excellent job opportunities for Medical Laboratory Assistants are expected. Most jobs will continue to be in hospitals, but employment will grow faster in other settings. Employment of laboratory workers is expected to grow 14 percent between 2006 and 2016, faster than average for all occupations. The volume of laboratory tests continues to increase with both population growth and the development of new types of tests.

Technological advances will continue to have opposing effects on employment. On the one hand, new, increasingly powerful diagnostic tests will encourage additional testing and spur employment. On the other, research and development efforts targeted at simplifying routine testing procedures may enhance the ability of non-laboratory personnel—physicians and patients in particular—to perform tests now conducted in laboratories.

Job opportunities for Medical Laboratory Assistants are expected to be excellent because the number of job openings is expected to continue to exceed the number of job seekers. Although significant, job growth will not be the only source of opportunities. As in most occupations, many additional openings will result from the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations, retire, or stop working for some other reason.

Salary
Median annual wage and salary earnings of Medical Laboratory Assistants in 2010 were $13.52 per hour or $28,122 annually. There is little difference in wages across laboratory type, hospital size and testing volume.

*Source: ASCP Wage Survey*