



Emerging Profession: Combined Laboratory and X-Ray Technologist (CLXT)

Every Canadian should have access to adequate health care. But what happens when the professionals trained to deliver that health care are in short supply, when it's difficult to attract and retain skilled workers in remote communities and when health budgets are scrutinized?

Hiring a single person to work in two areas can be an appealing solution.

This notion of combined training is not new in Canada. Rural hospitals that serve small populations don't always have the workload for both a medical laboratory technologist (MLT) and a medical radiation technologist (MRT), and yet can't deny these essential services to their patients. Back in 1946, Saskatchewan became the first province to respond to this need. Its department of public health developed a free six-month Combined Technicians certification course for war

Hiring a single
person to work in
two areas can be an
appealing solution



veterans, training them in both lab and x-ray procedures so they could work at rural sites. Within 20 years, the program was broadened and made available at the post-secondary institution now known as Saskatchewan Polytechnic.

The province of Alberta followed suit in 1954, initiating its own Combined Laboratory and X-Ray Technology (CLXT) program. In 2006, Alberta became the first – and so far, only – province to properly regulate the CLXT profession (acclxt.com).

Most CLXT graduates today continue to

find work in small-town settings, where they can apply both their lab and radiography skills, says Laureen Millette, a licensed MLT and past head of the Saskatchewan Polytechnic program. “There has been a steady demand for CLXT graduates within the province. Saskatchewan Polytechnic CLXT students are work-ready upon graduation and have had no issues finding jobs in their profession in the last few years. The wages are good too, especially when working in a more rural location.” CLXTs are not necessarily cheaper to hire than MLTs

and MRTs, but when they’re on staff at a rural facility, it often reduces the overall number of staff needed. It can also mean putting just one person on call, instead of two.

CLXTs also benefit patients, suggests Mark Given, Director of Professional Practice at the Canadian Association of Medical Radiation Technologists (CAMRT). “They have access to the patient care that they need in smaller communities. In my opinion, the CLXTs do fill a distinct need within the health system in Canada.”

While this combined profession has quietly thrived in small hospitals for over six decades, the training has expanded noticeably in more recent years. “The scope of practice is changing in the rural community,” says Given. “The need for diagnostic testing is only going up. The testing has improved and the number of tests has continued to increase. It will be important for the CLXTs to adjust their practice to ensure they have

“Most CLXT graduates today continue to find work in small-town settings, where they can apply both their lab and radiography skills.”
 – Laureen Millette, MLT, past head of the Saskatchewan Polytechnic program

and that they meet standards,” Arndt says. “Otherwise, outside of Alberta, there’s no mandate to ensure they’ve completed proper training to call themselves a CLXT.”

Regulation also ensures that members maintain their competency. Saskatchewan Polytechnic’s curriculum is routinely reviewed to reflect health care trends. When there are changes, distance education programs are developed for graduates. But Dupont says without regulation, they can’t force CLXTs to update their skills. “It’s up to technologists to maintain their education.”

Colin Power, Chair of the Newfoundland and Labrador Council of Health Professionals and a graduate of Newfoundland’s new CLXT program, is looking forward to the imminent regulation in his province. “Right now, the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Medical Radiation Technologists doesn’t recognize us, and we don’t have a body to help us with continuing education.”

Even as more individual provinces regulate, there will continue to be irregular training and independent standards. “When you get graduates from Alberta and Saskatchewan, they have slightly different functions that they’re able to do,” says Millette. “So as new programs come on board, there could be major differences.”

Enter a new national body striving to represent the profession in all jurisdictions. The Canadian Society of Combined Laboratory and X-Ray Technologists³ was accepted just two years ago.

The society’s first Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held this fall. The group aims to establish a national competency profile and exam, perhaps even country-wide training one day. “We’d sure like to

see fully trained CLXTs in all the provinces across the country,” says Dupont. “Our hope is to be able to create a bank of support and information, and uniform education across Canada.”

It’s expected that as rural populations age, the diversity of health testing increases, and budgets are tightened, CLXTs will be in greater demand. “I think it’s a combination of human resource shortages, combined with the fact that rural Canada is seeing declining numbers, and then the fiscal demands that each of the provinces are undergoing,” says Power, who currently works in the tiny town of Placentia, Newfoundland. Like Given, he believes that CLXTs ultimately mean better access to health care for patients. “In the environment I’m in, I think they would not have the full services they enjoy right now without the combined lab and x-ray technologists.”

With regulation, those services will be not just more accessible, but safer. “When technologists perform restricted or high-risk activities, there needs to be another layer of oversight in place to protect the patient,” notes Arndt. “That’s truly what the goal of regulation is – to decrease the risk to the public.” ■

Editor’s Note: CSMLS expresses our support toward the advantages of regulation and provincial licensure in ensuring patient safety and quality health care delivery as this profession gains ground and support in the future.

REFERENCES:

- ▶ ¹Alberta College of Combined Laboratory and X-ray Technologists
<http://www.acclxt.com>
- ▶ ²Saskatchewan Association of Combined Laboratory and X-ray Technicians
<http://sacclxt.ca>
- ▶ ³Canadian Society of Combined Laboratory & X-ray Technologists
<https://www.facebook.com/CSCLXT>

The society’s first Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held this fall. The group aims to establish a national competency profile and exam, perhaps even country-wide training one day.



LISA BENDALL
Special to CJMLS