

health field is essential to attract new people and keep current lab professionals in the field.

By educating people about the exciting and challenging opportunities in medical laboratories, making it possible for more people to move into the field, and offering better pay and more schedule flexibility, the current shortage can be eased, creating a skilled, motivated workforce to meet the country's increasing reliance on diagnostic testing. "With demand increasing, this field offers an excellent chance to gain secure employment and also an opportunity to move quickly up the 'corporate ladder' as older workers retire," adds recruiter Kelly Gutilla. "We need to communicate that message to those who will make up the future lab workforce." □

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Tomorrow's lab: the stuff of dreams

By Phil Bookman

Tomorrow's clinical labs are sure to lean on whiz-bang technologies and testing procedures only dreamed of today. Will the methods most labs rely on to train workers of the future be cutting-edge, too? For every tool and test that is sold in the years ahead, labs must train workers to use these wares with precision. That is a big job. A lab manager should not rely on old-fashioned methods to tackle the task.

ARUP Laboratories of Salt Lake City is one company that has tapped leading-edge technology to train workers: a learning-management system (LMS). For ARUP, the LMS maintains precision in the lab, tracks employee know-how, and makes sure employees meet a host of training requirements.

Before the LMS, ARUP kept track of training by hand, not unlike most labs. Using notebooks, computer spreadsheets, and databases, the Utah lab recorded the results of training and prepared for inspections from various accrediting agencies.

Delivering and tracking training amounted to a necessary but burdensome process. With 1,600 technicians and scientists to train each year, ARUP spent thousands of hours a year educating its staff. (In fact, the majority of labs shoulder an unnecessary workload when it comes to the job of delivering and reporting on training.) When inspectors came to see if training requirements had been met at ARUP, the lab always delivered, but creating audit reports took too long.

ARUP began a hunt for technology that would automate training at the lab. Simply put, ARUP wanted a product that would tell managers what their workforce had taken in the way of training. Along with that, the lab wanted to give employees access to their transcripts, as well as a way to register for classes. The Utah-based lab also sought a system that would create reports that measured the know-how possessed by the lab's teams. These computer-generated reports would also make quick work out of answering inspections by accrediting agencies.

After assessing its needs, ARUP saw what it would take to create a system from scratch. After surveying the marketplace, ARUP found dozens of companies that made learn-

ing-management systems — Web-based platforms that deliver, track, and report on training — for a range of prices, and eventually chose an LMS from a company with healthcare experience, with an initial investment requiring tens of thousands of dollars.

From the start, ARUP's LMS offered executives a streamlined way not only to deliver training to the lab's hundreds of workers but also to account for what everyone learned. ARUP says the system saves at least 3,000 hours of administrative time each year. This is time its training staff would spend recording the results of training, fielding calls from employees asking for transcripts or class schedules, and preparing for inspections. With the LMS, all of those chores are now automated.

The ARUP workforce can launch the system from a PC in the lab. Lab managers can use the LMS to see what courses their charges are taking. Whether it is delivering safety training online, recording one-on-one training for blood filtering, or storing credits for a continuing education class, the LMS keeps tabs.

Lab professionals can fire up the LMS to download a quick-and-easy copy of what they have learned — handy for performance reviews, as well as for charting what training to take. For managers, the LMS proves their teams have complied with mandatory training requirements. Because the LMS delivers online training, workers can leapfrog material that they might otherwise have to sit through in a class. In some cases, the system can cut training time by as much as 50%. Last, the learning-management system lets managers analyze a workforce's strengths and weaknesses. For instance, top executives can compare what their employees know against the organization's goals.

ARUP met its goals by building tomorrow's lab today and underpinning its training with a learning-management system. What could an LMS do for other labs with similar challenges? Tomorrow will be here before you know it. □

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