

Development of a Global Certification Program for Biorepository Technical Professionals

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Introduction

CURRENTLY, TECHNICAL STAFF for biorepositories come to their work with a variety of educational and professional experiences. Some begin having completed a baccalaureate program with laboratory experience while others have acquired their knowledge of biorepository operations through years of experience working in a biobank without having initiated formal coursework at a university. Inconsistent recognition of the value of the contributions made by biobank technical staff has in many cases led to lower salaries and higher turnover, making it challenging for specimen repositories to consistently operate efficiently and to guarantee that only the highest quality specimens are available for research.

In recent years, several excellent educational courses have been developed to address the need for substantive training in a number of areas relating to effective biorepository operations, such as specimen tracking, shipping, quality assurance, and others. In addition to these courses, ISBER offers a variety of courses and workshops as a part of its annual meeting. In spite of the value of these courses, access to them is not always possible for repository technicians due to limited funding and other circumstances that may make participation difficult. In order to begin to address this issue, ISBER has created a new, reduced registration category for repository technicians who desire to attend the 2012 Annual Meeting.

In addition to these important educational initiatives, ISBER recognizes that a need exists for broadly available, consistent education and training opportunities for repository technicians. The training will ensure that those who desire it can have access to a body of knowledge that will support their understanding of successful strategies for supporting the collection, processing, storage, and dissemination of high quality biospecimens for research. To this aim, ISBER is partnering with the Board of Certification of the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) to explore the feasibility of developing what is being called a Certification Program for Repository Technicians. Successful participants in the program will be certified for their acquisition of knowledge essential to repository operations.

About the Certification of Repository Technicians Program

The goals for the program are to:

- Improve the consistency in operations by increasing the number of staff trained in effective process for operating banks;
- Create opportunities to expand the depth of knowledge for particular biobanks by providing them access to a pool of candidates that are educated regarding state-of-the-art repository practices;
- Enhance interest in the selection of repository technical work as a career;
- Improve the perceived value of certified technicians among stake holders at the repository,
- Help reduce turnover at repositories.

The program, as it is currently envisioned, will be designed for individuals with a defined educational background, based on a scientific discipline in the life sciences with laboratory experience and with some actual work experience in a repository or biobank. For those individuals who have not obtained a university degree, work experience commensurate with educational experience is expected to be allowed. Exact criteria for those who are eligible to sit for the exam are currently under development.

This program will be “educational” in nature and will assess the participant’s comprehension of strategies needed to implement effective biobanking operations. While ISBER’s Best Practices (<http://www.isber.org/bp/index.cfm>) have been created to ensure that repositories have effective systems in place for operating repositories, the Certification Program for Repository Technicians, will help participants understand what goes into the development of those systems so that technicians can successfully contribute to their implementation in the repositories in which they work. The questions for the exams will be based on subject material presented in the third edition of ISBER’s *Best Practices*, which is currently in the final stages of preparation and is expected to be released within the next six months.

Those sitting for the examination will be expected to have participated in educational training activities that are being

developed to increase the likelihood of successful passage of the certification examination. Modules encompassing the subject material will be created by subject matter experts and will be developed simultaneously with the creation of examination questions to ensure consistency.

About the American Society for Clinical Pathology

ISBER has chosen to partner with the Board of Certification (BOC) of the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP) for a variety of reasons. The BOC has a rich history of developing similar programs for laboratory professionals globally, offering support in the arenas of test development and examination oversight, as well as in providing a proctored testing environment in many countries around the globe. In addition, the BOC will assume responsibility for the administration of the program, easing the need for additional staffing to manage the program within ISBER itself.

Next Steps

On October 24, 2011 ISBER was officially notified by the BOC of its interest in partnering with ISBER on this program and, together, ISBER and the ASCP BOC will convene an experts' working group comprised of individuals from the BOC Examination Oversight Committee and subject matter experts from ISBER. Additional market research may be performed to further define the goals of the program that will contain questions specifically targeted to a credentialing examination.

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