The Joint Commission Previews New Lab Accreditation Standards

Surveys on revised requirements to begin July 2011

(Oakbrook Terrace, Ill.—February 8, 2011) The Joint Commission “Comprehensive Accreditation Manual for Laboratory and Point-of-Care Testing (CAMLAB)” has been updated to provide clarity, additional specificity and detail to the standards and elements of performance. A preview of the new manual is posted on The Joint Commission website, http://www.jointcommission.org/accreditation/lab_standards_information.aspx, and laboratories will be surveyed against the new manual beginning in July 2011.

The updated standards were designed to help accredited laboratories provide high-quality diagnostic services. The standards and related elements of performance provide clearer compliance expectations to make the on-site survey process more transparent, but continue to offer flexibility for laboratories to tailor the standards for their specific organization. For example, diagnostic guidance has been improved in areas such as genetic testing, flow cytometry, mass spectrophotometry and cytogenetics. In addition, the Blood Transfusion Service and Donor Center standards have been expanded and no longer reference the AABB standards for the survey process. Approximately nine percent of the new standards and 32 percent of the new elements of performance are associated with removing the reference to AABB standards.

Accredited labs will receive the new standards in the 2011 Update 1 to the manual, to be published in March. In addition, a supplemental publication that references industry consensus guidelines and standards to help labs develop policies and procedures is now available on The Joint Commission website, http://www.jointcommission.org//useful_reference_documents_lab/.

“The Joint Commission’s philosophy is to allow labs the depth to perform necessary testing at the highest level of performance,” says Jennifer F. Rhamy, M.B.A., M.A., MT (ASCP),...
SBB, HP, executive director Laboratory Accreditation Program, The Joint Commission. “The revisions add depth to the standards and elements of performance; however, the standards are general enough to provide labs the opportunity to tailor the standards to their specific services. Blood transfusion services will appreciate that the blood transfusion service and donor center standards have been expanded to clearly identify the processes to be evaluated during survey.”

The new standards are the result of an intensive and collaborative process which involved leading industry experts. The Joint Commission worked closely with a group of laboratorians, including pathologists and laboratory managers from a wide range of facility sizes and types to provide broad insight into the quality system needs of laboratories. In addition, many industry documents and resources were reviewed to identify requirements that support high reliability laboratory practices. The draft standards were reviewed by the field in October, 2010.

The Joint Commission is a leading accreditor of laboratories, accrediting nearly 2,000 laboratories and 3,000 CLIA certificate sites. Approximately 90 percent of Joint Commission accredited labs are part of an accredited hospital, while 10 percent of the labs are freestanding.

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Founded in 1951, The Joint Commission seeks to continuously improve health care for the public, in collaboration with other stakeholders, by evaluating health care organizations and inspiring them to excel in providing safe and effective care of the highest quality and value. The Joint Commission evaluates and accredits more than 18,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States, including more than 9,700 hospitals and home care organizations, and more than 6,800 other health care organizations that provide long term care, behavioral health care, laboratory and ambulatory care services. In addition, The Joint Commission also provides certification of more than 1,700 disease-specific care programs, primary stroke centers, and health care staffing services. An independent, not-for-profit organization, The Joint Commission is the nation's oldest and largest standards-setting and accrediting body in health care. Learn more about The Joint Commission at www.jointcommission.org.