



# The Bayou Tech

January 2019

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## Contact Us

<https://www.lscls.org/>

## President's Corner

Happy New Year! 2019 is sure to be an exciting year for LSCLS. If you are interested in becoming more active with ASCLS or LSCLS, there will be plenty of opportunities in 2019.

Are you interested in Networking? In February, Clinical Laboratory Educators Conference (CLEC) will be held in Baltimore. In March, the Legislative Symposium will be held in Washington, D.C. In April, the LSCLS/ASCLS-MS Bi-annual meeting will be held in Monroe. In June, the ASCLS National meeting will be held in Charlotte, North Carolina. These are wonderful opportunities to meet other Medical Laboratory Professionals, and share stories and experiences.

Are you interested in Leadership? At the bi-state meeting, elections for several board positions will take place. Nominations are currently being accepted. There are also many committee positions open if you are interested in leadership, but not quite ready for a board position.

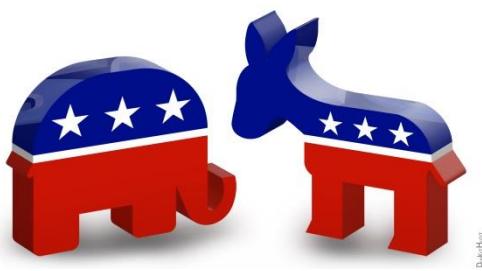
Are you interested in promotion of the profession? Get involved locally. Reach out to your local schools, both elementary and high schools. Get our profession out there. Many people do not know what Medical Laboratory Professionals mean to a community and what opportunities are out there. Recruit more members. Without our membership, the organization cannot provide the services it currently does. Tell your coworkers what about LSCLS and what we do for the profession. Get them involved!

Are you interested in government affairs and lawmaking? Attend the legislative symposium. Reach out to local, state, and national lawmakers and make your voices heard. Educate them about our profession. We must be the voice of our profession.

I hope to see everyone in Monroe at the 2019 LSCLS/ASCLS-MS Bi-state meeting April 8-11, 2019. If you have any questions, be sure to reach out to us at [lscls@gmail.com](mailto:lscls@gmail.com).

Karen Williams, MT (ASCP)  
LSCLS President

## The Political Rundown



PAMA has had a devastating effect on the laboratory industry. Recent changes in the 2019 Final Rule should provide some pricing relief but not until 2021. Currently, laboratories are bracing for another 10% cut in 2019.

Laboratories embraced the concept of basing Medicare reimbursement on market rates for tests but the problem has been with the CMS implementation of PAMA. Four big problems exist with it:

- **Applicable laboratory definition:** the narrow definition excludes the majority of higher priced outreach laboratories in calculating market rates for tests. The recent decision to include some hospital outreach representation in the 2019 market data collection will help but it is merely the initial step to achieving a true market-based pricing system envisioned

by the law.

- **Data Collection:** both large and small laboratories had problems submitting accurate data because of the lack of sound financial systems. The result was a wide disparity in reported prices; e.g., reimbursement of \$0.01 by one laboratory for the same test a different laboratory reported receiving \$999,999 in payment.
- **Data Weighing:** data collection is not weighted appropriately to reflect the actual market and variance in reimbursement rates among them.
  - **Independent laboratories** represent only 50% of the Clinical Laboratory Fee Schedule (CLFS) volume but 90% of the collected data resulting in **overrepresentation** of 40% in the data.
  - **Hospital laboratories** represent 27% of the CLFS volume but only 1% of the data collected resulting in a 26% **underrepresentation** in the data.
  - **Physician office laboratories** represent 23% of the CLFS volume but only 7.5% of the data resulting in 15.5% **underrepresentation** in the data.
- **Pricing Formula:** PAMA legislation specifically bases its “market price” on “weighted” median rather than weighted average of data collected. The weighted average considers every price of the volume of tests performed at that price for all submitters. If the total number of hospital laboratories had submitted data, the market pricing calculated on a weighted average could have yielded a CLFS *increase* of 3.8% in the last round.

Therefore, broadening the applicable laboratories definition will not solve all of the problems as long as the rate-setting continues to be based on weighted median prices.

### **Impact and Consequences of PAMA**

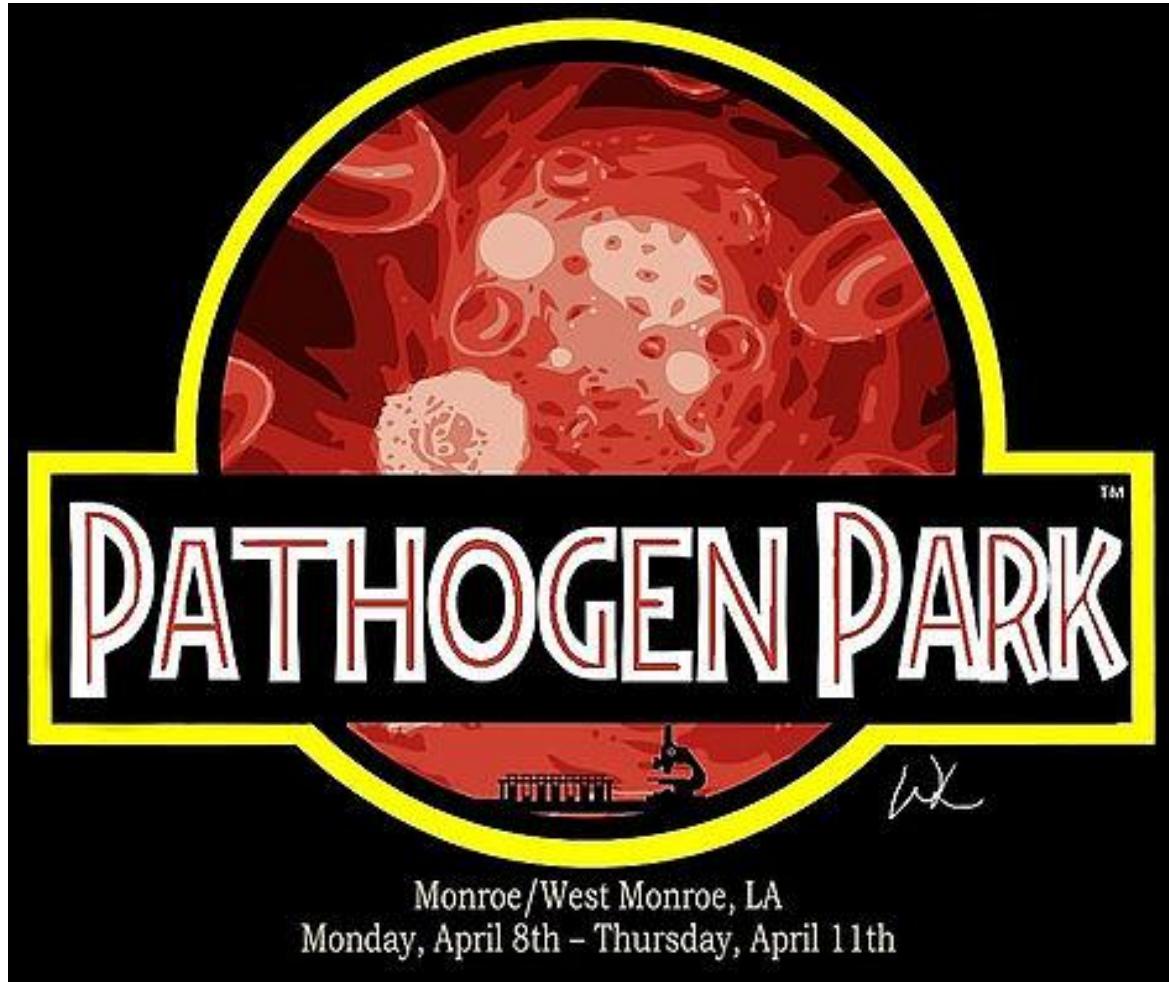
- The immediate impact is a significant reimbursement deduction for diagnostic tests. Reimbursement reductions have been significantly reduced more than originally estimated by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) (\$390 M savings in 2018). During 2018, however, the OIG revised that estimate to \$670 M. This amount does not include private sector reimbursement reductions (because of the Medicare/Medicaid price erosion) in renewal contracts by an average of 20-30%.
- There will be and have been consequences to the revenue reductions:
  - Laboratories have begun to cut staff to help offset the lost revenue
  - More laboratories will begin to specialize in test types such as cancer, diabetes, genetic, pain, etc. rather than have a comprehensive test menu
  - The number of rural and nursing home laboratories that receive the majority of their revenue from Medicare/Medicaid will decline.
  - Freestanding and physician office laboratories will face increased pressure to consolidate.
  - Hospitals will demand greater efficiency to leverage diagnostic services to reduce costs and improve outcomes.
  - As in house testing menus are pared down, reference laboratories performing higher level and value tests will pick up the slack and grow.

### **How Can a Laboratory Survive?**

- Until the CLFS reflects market reality, laboratories need to eliminate contracts tied to the Medicare fee schedule. Other contract negotiation options need to be explored such as a market rate by CPT code for a subset of codes most important to the laboratory.
- Test menu diversification to include high level and high value tests with reimbursement levels to support the cost structure and expanding specialty testing capabilities should be considered
- Data management will be key to survival. For now, sound pricing data for PAMA reporting and controlling costs to offset reimbursement cuts are needed.
- Long-term, laboratories need to recognize the data opportunity and map out a strategy to take advantage of it

Submitted by Cheryl Caskey MLS(ASCP)<sup>CM</sup>

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Monroe/West Monroe, LA  
Monday, April 8th - Thursday, April 11th

Registration is now open for the 2019 LSCLS/ASCLS-MS Bi-State Meeting at the Monroe Convention Center.

Visit [www.LSCLS.org](http://www.LSCLS.org) for more information including the hotel information, preliminary program, and online registration.

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## Have questions for CLIA? - SPEAK UP!

You may have noticed on the preliminary program for the 2019 LSCLS/ASCLS-MS Bi-State Meeting, there will be an anonymous Q&A session with Alexa Little, the CLIA Program Manager for Louisiana. If you have a burning regulatory question you have wanted to ask but have been worried about drawing attention to your laboratory here is your chance. Submit your questions to [lscls@gmail.com](mailto:lscls@gmail.com). Questions will be compiled and sent anonymously to the CLIA Office and Alexa will address as many questions as she can during her Q&A session. Alexa will also be giving a session entitled CLIA's Not Top 10. What a great opportunity!

Let's get some questions answered!

Michele Werner  
LSCLS Past President

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## ASCLS LAB WEEK VIRTUAL RUN

Lab Week is quickly approaching, and ASCLS has again put together the ever popular Lab Week Run. The Run, in its fourth year of existence, has become a hit across the country for Medical Laboratory Professionals. Lab Week is huge no matter where you work, as we are celebrating not only the profession, but each other as well. When the Lab Week Run was in its beginning stages we wanted the Run to not only help each other come together for something fun and exciting, but

also have it promote the profession.

The Lab community has come out in full force and embraced the Lab Week Run. A virtual run is different than your standard 5K. You can choose to reach the goal distance however you would like to. You can walk, jog, run, use a treadmill, outside on trails, or just walking at work to get the distance. Many participants completed the run in groups while others did it by themselves. The virtual aspect is great and, for me, takes a lot of the pressure off. I love that the run can be done on my own time and terms. I don't have to set aside an entire morning on the weekend to run. I can find time during the week on multiple days to complete the distance.

Now, the Lab Week Run is not just about the running and walking. We encourage everyone to submit race photos whether it be in a group dressed up or just a selfie at the gym. Completing a run is huge accomplishment and we want everyone to share that accomplishment with their peers. Everyone who registers for the Lab Week Run gets a finishers medal. This medal has been one of my favorite things about the run. The medal designs have been amazing and different every year. Previous medal designs have been a microscope, a micro plate with gram positive cocci character running, a centrifuge that actually spun when you turned it, and this year it's a running blood drop and the feet move back and forth!



If any of you are interested in the Lab Week Run please go to the website [www.labweekrun.com](http://www.labweekrun.com) for more information or to register. This year there is an added Lab Week Run T-Shirt and the design is amazing. There is an early bird sale going on now that ends January 31, 2019. Race packets are only \$35 during this time period before prices go up so get them while they're hot and on sale! All proceeds raised benefit ASCLS's Ascending Professional Forum (formerly New Professionals and New Members Forum). These funds have been used for travel grant opportunities to help send forum members

to ASCLS National Meetings and the Legislative Symposium. Finally, I want to express my sincerest thanks to the entire Lab Week Run team for doing an amazing job every year!

James Gardner, MLS(ASCP)<sup>CM</sup>  
LSCLS President-Elect

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## We Need YOU To Get Involved



It's that time again—time for nominations for LSCLS officers, as well as for delegates to attend the 2019 ASCLS meeting, to be held in Charlotte, NC. The positions will be voted on at the Spring 2019 bi-state meeting in Monroe, LA. The positions that need to be filled in 2019 are listed below. Included in the list are also the terms of office for each position, as well as brief descriptions of the duties of each position. More detailed descriptions are listed in the LSCLS Policies and Procedures.

- President-Elect, 2019-2021 – Become familiar with the duties of the office of the president and fill the office of the president should it become vacant. It is assumed that the President-Elect will become the next President of LSCLS.
- Secretary, 2019-2020 – Keep a permanent record of minutes taken at all meetings, including regular society business meetings and meetings of the Board of Directors.
- New Professional Chair, 2019-2020 – Represent the needs and ideas of new laboratory professionals, and encourage membership and involvement of new professionals in LSCLS and ASCLS.

- Nominations Committee, 2019-2020 (3 positions) – Present a list of nominees in ballot form to the voting members of the society prior to the regular business meeting, take nominations from the floor just prior to the election, and count ballots after voting has ended.
- Area V (Acadia, Evangeline, Iberia, Lafayette, Saint Landry, Saint Martin, Saint Mary, and Vermilion parishes.) Representative, 2019-2022 – Recruit new members for LSCLS and ASCLS from Area V, communicate state and national activities, policies, and information to area members, and serve as a resource person for the area in regard to society and professional issues.
- Delegates for the 2019 ASCLS meeting – Represent LSCLS at the ASCLS House of Delegates, to vote on officers, bylaws, standards of professional practice, and direction of the national society.

Please email nominations to Lee Ellen Brunson-Sicilia at [lscls@gmail.com](mailto:lscls@gmail.com)

Ballots will be mailed out toward the end of February. Nominations will also be taken from the floor at the 2019 LSCLS spring business meeting in Monroe.

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## Student Member Highlights

### From Your Chairman

- Get excited for this year's Bi-state Student Bowl Meeting in Monroe, LA- April 8-11
- Students, if you are interested in running for student forum office, Info will be sent out to programs soon, so stay tuned!!
- Who's taking the boards this year? Have you checked out the newest edition of the BOC review book?
- Don't forget to follow us on Facebook for fun board questions, student bowl updates, and MLS news!  
<enter fb icon> @ LSCLS Student Forum

Hope everyone is off to a great semester!  
Allie Perez  
LSCLS Student Forum Chair

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## Student Bowl

Student Bowl 2019 is almost here! Our Annual Bi-State LSCLS/MSCLS Meeting is being held in Monroe, LA at the Monroe Civic Center on April 8th-11th. Student Bowl generates a healthy competition between MLS Students from across several states and many universities! Come be a part of the fun and cheer on your favorite team! Student Bowl will kick off the meeting on Monday, April 8th from 8am-5pm. And finals will be held Tuesday, April 9th from 8am-11am. If you don't like being on the "sidelines", well then volunteers are needed! We need Moderators, Judges, Scorekeepers, and extra sets of helping hands! If you would like to volunteer to help with Student Bowl Competition, or if you have any questions, please email Rosalie Hendrix (Student Bowl Coordinator) at [Rosalie.Hendrix@fmolhs.org](mailto:Rosalie.Hendrix@fmolhs.org).

## The Importance of Recruitment in Louisiana

Over the past decade, Louisiana's higher education system has received millions of dollars in overall budget cuts in state-based funding. In the past year alone, the University of Louisiana system, comprising nine state institutions, received a reduction of an estimated 5.2 million dollars. Current projections from the governor's office admit to even further budget cuts, while it will allow for "minimizing cuts to higher education". Many Louisiana universities administrative units have directed their faculty and staff are to prioritize student recruitment and retainment in an attempt to compensate for these deficits. According to the Louisiana Board of Regents' Employment Outcomes Report of 2011, healthcare professionals are the largest percentage of bachelor's recipients who remained in the state of Louisiana after graduation, at an impressive 70% retention. Based on this data, recruitment of students into healthcare fields can enhance the state's budget pre- and post-graduation.

An additional factor involves a 2010 mandate to increase the diversity of healthcare students to build a workforce ready to accommodate diverse populations of patients across the lifespan. Therefore, the needs of a 4-year healthcare learning institution should involve: recruitment of diverse populations, retainment, and retention via employment in-state. Research has also shown that increasing minority populations in healthcare fields helps address the shortage of healthcare workers found in underserved communities. For the most comprehensive recruitment strategy, non-traditional students should not be overlooked. Research into older individuals returning or starting 2- or 4-year institutions is minimal, but some research indicates that recruitment and retainment programs need to be developed specifically for this population. Recruitment of older students includes addressing their needs for flexible class times, technological gaps, and extra academic counseling. Non-traditional or older students constitute a large potential market for recruitment into healthcare fields. If the technological gap is not too large, online learning can offer attractive schedules for their current work schedules. Older adults tend to possess more life experiences than their younger counterparts, and often already know how to organize and prioritize. High school students interested in healthcare careers can benefit from internship situations, which also benefit the region's hospitals. This is the area in which local laboratorians can play a large part in the solution, by providing tours to local high school groups and serving as guest speakers at science fairs and career days.

These types of activities are proven research-based strategies to enhance recruitment of top students into our field. YOU, the active MLS professional, can inspire recruitment efforts into our profession. Your local academic institution can act as a resource, so contact them about partnering at their next career fair! Promoting value in our profession, which relates to worth of salary, increases our cumulative importance by hospitals and other employers.

**Sonya Hidalgo, M.A.T., MLS (ASCP)**

Clinical Assistant Professor  
Medical Laboratory Science  
*McNeese State University*