

**Department of Veterans Affairs
Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Service**

**Report to the
Intersociety Pathology Council
Sunday, March 25, 2007**

**Fred H. Rodriguez, Jr., MD
Director, Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Service**

The Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Service continues to provide high quality services to support patient care in the nation's largest integrated healthcare system. All of the laboratories in the VA continue to be fully accredited by external inspection agencies. Many VA laboratories continue to provide valuable training experiences for both resident physicians and non-physician laboratorians through affiliation agreements. VA pathologists continue to provide high quality diagnostic, educational, and research services.

There are a number of significant projects that involve the VA Pathology and Laboratory Medicine Service (P&LMS).

- The Laboratory System Re-engineering Initiative: This project to re-engineer the VA's laboratory information system continues to progress, but due to funding cut backs, the timeline for implementation has been delayed. Prototype development continues, and some "alpha" testing is expected to commence by the end of 2007. Enhancements to improve appropriate utilization of laboratory resources, interface with a national "health data repository", and provide "decision support" to clinical providers are but are few examples of specifications being designed for the re-engineered system.
- The Bar Code Expansion Project: This project is designed to add functionalities for labeling of lab specimens, blood component administration, vital signs, enhancement of medication administration, and read access to the patient's electronic medical record (i.e. CPRS) using wireless technology at the patient's bedside. The most significant aspect of the BCE project is to improve patient safety and reduce medical errors. Initial implementation phases are scheduled to begin later in 2007.
- The Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* Prevention Program: This project is to eliminate MRSA infections. The program involves active surveillance, implementation of contact precautions when patients who are colonized are identified, hand hygiene, and "cultural" change. The Pathology Service will play a key role in performing the surveillance screening either by Chromagar cultures or PCTR technology.
- The Armed Forces Institute of Pathology: With the approval of the Base Realignment and Closure plan of the Department of Defense by Congress, one of the BRAC

initiatives is the “disestablishment of the AFIP. The educational and consultative services that the AFIP has provided are specifically scheduled to close. The tissue repositories are scheduled to be placed in the care of the Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences in Bethesda, MD. All of organized pathology should be united to support federal legislation to assure a secure future for all of the functions the AFIP. The AFIP is indeed a “national treasure” for pathology, not only for its tissue repositories, but for the public health and welfare functions that it provides. The VA is involved with representatives from the DoD triservices to develop a plan to find a replacement for the services that the AFIP had provided.

- Affiliation agreements and pathology residency training: I am not aware of any substantial changes to the existing allocation of pathology residency training positions at VA sites or the support for these positions.

While there are various other issues and programs that are the responsibility of the VA P&LMS, this brief synopsis highlights a few of the key projects.