

# When is a scientist not a scientist?

Terry Taylor

Our new medical laboratory science graduates have studied for four long years including their clinical placements to gain their BMLSc qualifications. The world is theoretically their oyster and to see the excitement in the graduating practitioners and the immense pride their families show is something I have treasured in my professional leadership role.

What I have not enjoyed is the continual and premeditated contempt that some of our managers have for these enthusiastic but often naïve graduates. It is simply not acceptable for any manager who sees fit to take advantage of the keenness of BMLSc graduates and employ them as medical laboratory technicians in a blatant 'cost cutting' move. Whilst everyone understands that there are dedicated technician positions advertised, it is the view of the NZIMLS (and the then Minister of Health, Chief of Allied Health, and Te Whatu Ora leadership) that this needs to be made clear to the new graduates and is not taken advantage of by employers. While we have such well-documented scientist shortages (1,2,3), it is completely short-sighted not to incorporate the BMLSc graduate workforce into the scopes they are trained for.

Just for context after correspondence and a meeting with the Health Minister, the Hon Andrew Little, the NZIMLS received a letter from the Minister on 16 February 2022 stating the following; "I understand the Ministry of Health has made a commitment that all medical laboratory science graduates are guaranteed employment, however it is important that graduates are employed in a way that they can work at the top of their scope. I understand that the Chief of Allied Health Professions, Dr Martin Chadwick has reached out to the Medical Sciences Council of New Zealand to provide better oversight and monitoring of the graduates to ensure their employment is appropriate. I am pleased that you [Terry Taylor] are also directly involved in this work".

I can assure the profession that this narrative is reciprocated through Te Whatu Ora through our NZIMLS discussions at the leadership level. Whilst I have never seen a policy or directive from any laboratory provider stating that they are changing the makeup of their workforce to a technician-based approach based on purely fiscal grounds, it is up to our professional members to stand up and callout any hint this is happening.

This is particularly pertinent when the new graduate is being utilised in a technically advanced role but not appropriately recognised. As we have seen over the period of the pandemic increasing pressure and responsibility above what is reasonably expected has detrimental results at every level of the medical laboratory workforce.

Everyone needs to be aware that over the next two years, our pathology services are going to undergo a generational change in governance, strategy, and priority. It is an expectation that our specialist scientist workforce will have significant role extension opportunities with our expertise spilling across the entire health system. It is up to all members of the NZIMLS to ensure that we maintain the push for professional excellence and not allow degrading or abuse of what we have worked so hard to achieve over the past three years.

He aha mea nui o te ao, he tangata, he tangata, he tangata.  
*'What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it is people.'*

## AUTHOR INFORMATION

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