Mental Health Issues in the Medical Laboratory Profession: Unifying a Profession in Support and Voice

Laura Zychla, Researcher
The Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science (CSMLS) is a not-for-profit organization. It is the national certifying body and professional society for medical laboratory technologists (MLT) and medical laboratory assistants (MLA).
• 1.2 million lab tests performed daily in Canada
• Completed by qualified and skilled medical laboratory professionals (MLPs)
• Approx. 70% of all decisions regarding a patient's diagnosis and treatment, hospital admission and discharge are based on laboratory test results.

500
Cases of cancer diagnosed every day

70,000
Heart attacks occur in Canada each year

2,000
Units of donated blood are needed everyday

14,000
Traumas occur every day
Climate Change

Rapid Technology Change

Health Human Resource Shortage

Exponential growth in diagnostic testing and treatment complexity monitoring

Mental Health Impacted

Across the Spectrum

Mental Wellness

Mental Health Issues

Mental Health Illness

csmls.org
scslm.org
Bimodal Mental Health Model

Traditional Model

Person-Centered Model
Advocacy and Awareness

Policy

Quantitative Data

Code of Ethics

Standards of Practice

Traditional Model

Toolkit

Qualitative Data

Guidance Documentation

Code of Professional Practice

Person-Centered Model
Policy Changes & Additions
National Mental Health Survey
Code of Ethics
Mental Health Toolkit
Online Focus Group
Guidance Document
Underlying Principles

• This ain’t the rodeo
  – Evidence based change is required
• “Nothing about me, without me.”¹
  – It’s not just about the patients; it’s about who is supporting them as well
• Ying must have yang to tell a complete story
• Story telling is imperative
  – It should not be considered ‘less’ is any manner
• Our goal should be pie in the sky

Code of Ethics and Guidance Document
• Grounded in research principles
• 21 codes of ethics were reviewed (exhaustive search), thematically coded, and validated for the profession
  – Be broad: Canadian and international
  – Be bold: MLP and non-MLP specific
  – Be wise: Other comparators such as mission statements, core organizational values, Code of Professional Conduct
• Multistage validation process with…
  – Experts: Ethics Working Group
  – Key Stakeholders: Presentation and information gathering at national meetings
    • LABCON 2014-16
    • Ethics Think Tank
  – Future Users: Survey to all members

csmls.org
scslm.org
The code companion is the guidance document and ethics course

- Grounding principles
- Fact sheet
- Principles of bioethics
- Glossary
- FAQ
- Resolution model
- Case scenarios
- Examples in the media
- Discussion board

National Mental Health Survey
and
Online Focus Group
• **Purpose:** Nation wide member survey for MLPs to identify mental health issues and illness levels, and quality of work life
  – **Full spectrum of wellbeing to illness examined**
  – **Targeted QofW questions**
• Thermometer of mental health in the workplace to be compared against in future

[csmls.org](https://csmls.org)  
[scslm.org](https://scslm.org)
• N=998, diverse group of CSMLS members
• Full range of mental health represented
  – NIOSH QofW specific questions & stress
  – Maslach Burnout Inventory
  – Kessler-6 (psychological distress, ability to discriminate serious mental illness)
  – RAND Mental Health Inventory (anxiety, depression, behavioral control & positive affect)
• Analysis currently being completed
• Of the 12% identified with severe mental health illness (K6) and were working, 61% had not seen a doctor or other health professional about these feelings in last 30 days.

• 57% ‘did not know’ or were ‘unsure’ if they had access to stress management or stress reduction programs at workplace.
  – 35% of these individuals felt stress ‘always’ or ‘often’.

• 52% said there were not enough people or staff to get all the work done ‘often’.
  – 31% of these individuals are ‘not at all likely’ to find a new job in the next year.

• 24% said they felt discriminated against in the workplace.
• **Purpose:** To examine mental health in story format using an online focus group methodology
  – *asynchronous discussion*
• 3 Days, each day new set of questions
  – **Between Days:** individual, organization, profession
  – **Within Day:** issue, cause, solution
• **N** = 29; Participation Rate Day 1 = 100%, Day 2 = 93%, Day 3 = 62%
How often do you experience the highest level of stress at work?

- Almost all day, every day: 31%
- Every night or day: 7%
- Once or twice daily: 21%
- 2-3 times per week: 24%
- Once a week: 14%
- Once a month: 3%

How often do you feel burned out because of work?

- Daily: 21%
- Weekly: 55%
- Monthly: 14%
- Yearly: 7%
- Never: 3%
• Root Cause of Workplace Stressors
  – Inadequate staffing
  – Increased Workload
  – Management Issues
  – Coworker Issues
  – Inadequate Equipment
  – Lack of Public Recognition
• High level grouping is only a portion of the story…
Reminder of why we did this….

“There is a better culture of mental illness and issues about anxiety and depression in most workplaces however hospitals seem to be falling behind in this regard. They say the right things and post the right posters but when push comes to shove the stigma is still there. If someone does take a stress leave, they are never treated the same.”
Policy and Mental Health Toolkit
• Policy additions and changes support culture change, internally and externally, for healthy work environments
• Creation of a Whistle Blower position statement
• Updating QofW position statement
  – The CSMLS considers the mental health and psychological safety of medical laboratory professionals to be as important as other aspects of health and safety.
• Diversity position statement
• Organization recognition of mental health awareness campaign(s)
  – Launch toolkit on WHO Mental Health Day
ARE YOU MENTALLY HEALTHY?

One in five Canadians will have a clinically defined mental illness in their lifetime. CSMLS has compiled a Mental Health Toolkit that empowers employees, employers, and organizations to take charge and make positive change within the medical laboratory profession.

Take charge of your life
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am an Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is Mental Health and Mental Illness?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Stress and Burnout?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Stressed Am I?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is my Reaction out of Balance?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Want to Know What Other People Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking Steps to Manage Stress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am a Manager</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management Style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Health &amp; Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Mental Health Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health First Aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bell's Let's Talk Conversation Guide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am an Employee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Code of Conduct Resolution Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult Conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am an Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Framework for an Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Assistance Programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Website Structure

Employee – Understanding Me as a Person
• What is Mental Health and Mental Illness?
• What is Stress and Burnout?
• Mental Health Theories and Research
• How Stressed Am I? Identify it! Is my Reaction out of Balance?
• I Want to Know What Other People Experience
• CSMLS Mental Health Stories
• Taking Steps to Manage your Mental Health
Management Quiz

1. I am concerned about whether staff members have enough time to get their work done within regular working hours.
   - Usually
   - Sometimes
   - Never

2. I act as a workload coach to my staff by assisting them to prioritize their work.
   - Usually
   - Sometimes
   - Never

3. My staff would agree that I try to ensure they are able to accomplish their work within regular working hours.
   - Usually
   - Sometimes
   - Never

4. I consider it important to involve my staff in decisions and changes that affect their work.
   - Usually
   - Sometimes
   - Never

5. I consult with my staff on decisions and changes that affect their work.
   - Usually
   - Sometimes
   - Never

6. My staff would agree that I consult with them on decisions and changes which affect their work.
   - Usually
   - Sometimes
   - Never

7. I consider it important that the amount of mental and emotional effort required by my staff to do their work is reasonable.
   - Usually
   - Sometimes
   - Never
Content Link Examples

- Manage Stress Workbook
- Mental Health Videos
- Stress Index
- My Meal Planner
- Health Break Activities
- Conflict Resolution Questionnaire
- Managing Emotions Skills Assessment for Managers
- Guarding Minds @ Work
- Business Case for a Health Workplace

csmls.org
scslm.org
Points to Remember

• Mental health in the workplace needs to move beyond traditional methods to be inclusive of a person-centred focus
  – Go beyond “mental health” to indirect areas such as ethics and whistle blowing
• Change does not come without evidence based work to prove a need across time and the impact of initiatives
  – Mental health should replicate medical health in some ways
• Unifying a professional voice means obtaining the language for this in a multitude of ways
  – Take lessons from patient centric models
  – Quantitative and qualitative

csmls.org
scslm.org
Points to Remember

Thank your medical laboratory professionals and other health professionals.

Kindness goes a long way to improving mental health in the workplace.

They deserve it!
Laura Zychla
research@csmls.org