

Lauren Fife
Bozeman Deaconess Laboratory
915 Highland Blvd
Bozeman Montana, 59715

I am a recent graduate of the Medical Laboratory Science training program at Montana State University. I passed my licensure exam in May and immediately started work at Bozeman Deaconess Hospital as a clinical laboratory scientist. Even as a very new member of the profession, the value of education and licensing requirements are easy to see. I cannot imagine doing this job competently without my education. Doctors base treatment and decisions on results the laboratory provides. An inaccurate test result could be a death sentence for the patient. Even a mistake that is not life threatening can lead to increased costs to the hospital and/or patient.

The field of medicine is always evolving, and requiring continuing education for licensure ensures that laboratory scientists remain up to date on new knowledge and technology. Doctors frequently call the lab to have test results explained. Sometimes the wrong test is ordered; the tech questions it and is able to correct a mistake, saving time and money. A person with no background knowledge would have difficulty doing this.

Every state requires licensure for cosmetologists. If the person who cuts your hair needs to pass an exam to be licensed and deemed qualified to perform their profession, wouldn't you want the person who is cross-matching compatible blood for your transfusion to be licensed and qualified as well? (It's not as simple as, "just give them O negative".) I know if I were hospitalized, I would not want a high school graduate with little training running my lab work and influencing how my doctor cares for me. It takes a vast amount of knowledge to work in a clinical laboratory. Some of it, running instruments and setting up cultures, can be learned with on the job training. Other things- working up antibodies in blood bank, recognizing cancerous cells on a peripheral blood smear, understanding the antibiotic susceptibilities of bacteria- require significant experience and education.

Clinical laboratory scientists are an integral part of the healthcare team. We view ourselves as professionals, take pride in our work, and are always doing our best to serve patients. Requiring licensure will ensure that we and our future colleagues are able to provide the high quality of care that all patients deserve.