

Laboratory License Requires Continuing Education in Tennessee

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All laboratory personnel licensed in the State of Tennessee are now required to get continuing education to maintain their licenses.

Since January 2006, the Tennessee Medical Laboratory Board has required all licensed laboratory personnel in the state to obtain 24 hours of approved continuing education every two years to maintain their licenses; these continuing education credits must be acquired in the two years prior to the license renewal year. Tennessee joined at least eight other states, including California and Florida, with continuing education requirements for laboratory personnel.

Continuing education has long been a basic element of professionalism and is considered one of the best ways to improve and maintain competency. Most professions have required continuing education for decades. Other states and many credentialing agencies, such as American Medical Technologists, have required continuing education for laboratory license renewal for many years.

New licensees are exempt for the first 24 months following initial licensure. The continuing education credits used to become licensed as a medical laboratory supervisor or a cytology general supervisor do not count toward the continuing education required to maintain licensure.

The education must be approved by the Tennessee Medical Laboratory Board and must pertain to laboratory technology or laboratory management. The Board has approved educational programs provided by more than forty agencies and their affiliates and chapters, including the Tennessee Medical Association and state licensed hospitals.

Licensees may also receive credit for preparing and teaching continuing education courses that are presented, sponsored or approved by one of the agencies approved by

the TMLB. Credit earned is four hours for each hour taught. If the prepared materials are less than five pages of outlines or not accompanied by written materials, the credit will be two hours for each hour taught. Repeat courses earn one-half of the credit earned for the initial course. A maximum of eight hours credit may be earned for preparing and teaching courses in any two-calendar-year period.

Four hours of continuing education credits may also be earned for writing an article on laboratory technology or management published in a peer review journal, such as *Medical Laboratory Observer* or *Advance for Medical Laboratory Professionals*.

Each licensee must maintain proof of attendance for at least three years beyond the two-calendar-year period in which the continuing education was acquired. This documentation must be available for review upon request by the Medical Laboratory Board, which does not maintain records for licensees. The documentation must be available within 30 days of the request.

Documentation may include notarized photocopies of certificates or letters on official letterhead and must include the following information: continuing education program's provider, date, clock hours earned, program title, licensee's name, and license number. All continuing education must be stated in clock hours. When seeking credit for articles written, complete copies of the published articles must be submitted.

Failure to submit the documentation within the required time frame may result in disciplinary measures. A one-time extension of six months may be requested in writing to

the Board, but it must include the reason the extension is needed. Any extension granted will apply only to that two-year cycle.

Disciplinary action may include probation, suspension or revocation of license, or civil penalty. These disciplinary actions will be imposed on a case-by-case basis and will not be lifted until the individual has appeared personally before the Board and has met all conditions set by the Board.

The law became effective in 2006. However, licensees will not be subject to an audit until they have had two full years to complete the continuing education in the two years prior to their certification year. In other words, those whose license is up for renewal in 2007 not be subject to an audit before 2008, giving them all of 2006 and 2007 to acquire the required hours.

This information is from the General Rules Governing Medical Laboratory Personnel, Chapter 1200-6-1, and is available on Tennessee's Web site at www2.tennessee.gov/health/Boards/MedLab/index.htm. For questions, please contact the Tennessee Medical Laboratory Board at 615-532-3202 or 800-778-4123. ■

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