Readers respond

Good job!
I realize that I am a bit late, but please accept my compliments on the article in the December 2004 issue by Colleen K. Gannon, “Responsible Reporting in Microbiology” [p. 18]. I worked in the clinical microbiology field from 1981 to 1993, the last four years spent as a microbiology supervisor (I left the field in 1993 to pursue a career in biotechnology). To keep my knowledge and practice current, I attended many seminars, read journals, and was an active member of the American Society of Microbiologists. Although all of these efforts paid off in providing me with the knowledge necessary to stay current in my field and provide good patient care, I never came across such a practical and useful article as Ms. Gannon has written. Please extend my appreciation to her for doing such a good job in a difficult field. We need more dedicated and knowledgeable professionals like her.

—Lindsay Webster, MBA, BS, Microbiology Immunoproduction Supervisor DakoCytomation Carpinteria, CA

Colleen Gannon’s reply: Thank you for your interest in my article. It is very difficult to standardize reporting practices in microbiology. So much depends on the knowledge of the lead technologist and support (or lack of support) of the medical staff at each facility. The greatest contribution you can make is to keep abreast of new developments, read the current literature, attend continuing education meetings whenever possible, and share your knowledge and enthusiasm with your co-workers.

Certificant exams noted
In regard to the Management Q&A in the May issue [p. 36], I would like to bring to the MLO readers’ attention that in addition to the DLM certification offered by ASCP, the NCA offers two certifications in laboratory management. One is the supervisor, and the second is the clinical laboratory director. The examination covers the scope of practice identified in a job analysis for each role in the laboratory. The supervisor certification is intended for the new or aspiring supervisor. Both examinations provide the certificant with a measure of their knowledge of management principles and application of those principles in problem-solving scenarios. For more information about the NCA examinations, go to the website www.nca-info.org. Thank you for publishing a very readable and practical publication for managers.

—Suzanne H. Batch, MA, MT(ASCP)SBB, CLDir (NCA) Chair, NCA Management Examination Committee; Blood Bank & Transfusion Service Ann Arbor, MI

A short history of Giemsa
I would like to comment on the spelling of one of the stains mentioned in MLO’s June 2005 cover article on bioterrorism [p. 10]. The stain (and its variation) is spelled Geimsa throughout the article and the test. Rather, it is Giemsa, named after Gustav Giemsa, who was the head of the Department of Chemistry at the Institute of Maritime and Tropical Diseases in Hamburg, Germany.

In 1891, Romanowsky mixed eosin Y and methylene blue to differentially stain blood cells and malaria parasites. Various techniques were tried over the next 10+ years to improve the staining, reduce unstainability, and eliminate precipitation, including trying different methods of oxidation of the methylene blue; using methanol solutions instead of aqueous, and fixing blood smears in methanol prior to staining.

Some of the names of these investigators should sound familiar, as we still use their contributions (Jenner, May and Grunwald, Leishman, Wright). However, it was Gustav Giemsa (1867-1948), pharmacist, chemist, and bacteriologist, who identified the dye as basic azure B, found a way to better control the oxidation of the dye, and combined it with the eosin in a methanol-glycerol mixture that created a stable solution with reproducible results. His article was published in 1904, and his formulation is still being used today, 101 years later.

—Peggy A. Wnek, HT(ASCP)SLS Program Director Schools of Histotechnology Anatomic Pathology William Beaumont Hospital Royal Oak, MI

Deadly grits
Zoonotic diseases have plagued mankind for millennia. Conditions such as chickenpox and cowpox (smallpox) have become common terms in our language, and chickenpox was once an anticipated experience of childhood. To propose “wearing protective gear” for any animal contact seems highly unfair, since, as you explained in your editorial, you were far more lethal to your pets than they were to you.

—Janet Robertson BS, RPh, BCNP Nuclear Pharmacist Riverside Methodist Hospital Columbus, OH

Editor’s Note: Judging from June’s cover story, despite the disease history the reader mentions, more exotic versions of zoonotic diseases have surfaced in recent years, spreading globally at a rate that precludes researchers from discovering timely “cures” to prevent deadly tragedies. My comment about “protective gear” was meant as a tongue-in-cheek remark, and, as was pointed out, ‘twas dear old “lethal” mama who did in the parakeet.

MLO welcomes letters to the editor. We ask that you include a phone number for verification. While we prefer to publish the writer’s name, we will publish a letter with “name withheld by request,” but our editorial staff must have the writer’s name confirmed for our files. MLO reserves the right to edit any letter for style and length.