We are developing an academic-outreach program to increase awareness of IT opportunities in labs and other healthcare sectors, which is an easy “sell” once we make students aware of the sheer size and the stability of the healthcare industry.

**Kirsten Cowan**

**Professional**
Chief Healthcare Liaison for SoftTech Health.
Active in the healthcare IT sector for seven years.
One-time university professor and instructor of computer applications.

**Education**
Earned BA in psychology from Queen’s University at Kingston, Ontario, Canada.

**Personal**
Board of directors member of a nonprofit group serving Costa Rican education.
Enjoys spending time with her two small children and is learning how to golf.

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**At SoftTech Health, automation is not just for testing anymore**

**Symptoms that indicate software is needed**
Labs are spending too much time trying to keep their policies, procedures, and other documents up-to-date and properly authorized. They are also spending literally thousands of combined labor hours preparing for accreditation, yet CAP’s most frequently cited deficiencies are related to document control. Labs are realizing that automation is not just for testing — management processes must be automated, too, in order to get the most from staff resources.

**What to look for in lab software**
A lab should look for an all-in-one software package that integrates document control with quality management; otherwise, it will encounter the headaches of patching together separate solutions. Next, it should ask whether the software is built specifically for labs. Labs have unique needs, and a general-purpose quality-management (QM) application will have gaps and redundancies. Finally, does the software help the lab make the most effective use of its staff in two respects: is it user-friendly so as to require minimal training, and does it offer maximum opportunities for automating as many tasks as possible to save time on a day-to-day basis?

**Impetus behind lab QM software**
Our QM software solution was born when hospital lab managers using our document control software asked us to address the related needs of accreditation and QM. Labs who see QM software for the first time tell us they plan to find the budget for it sooner rather than later. Lab managers are acutely aware of how labor hours saved translate to the bottom line. They recognize that they will save hours with such software in place.

**Time to ROI**
Labs can use our return on investment (ROI) calculator to plug in their own numbers and determine how quickly they can realize an ROI in document control/QM software — our typical lab customer would see an ROI in less than two months. There is a “soft” ROI, too; while it is hard to quantify lowered risk and reduced error rates in dollar terms, they have a very meaningful value to healthcare labs in particular.

**Careers in healthcare-related IT**
Young people do not consider careers that span labs and IT simply because they are not aware that such jobs are available. We are developing an academic-outreach program to increase awareness of IT opportunities in labs and other healthcare sectors, which is an easy “sell” once we make students aware of the sheer size and the stability of the healthcare industry. □