An accessible, multipronged approach advances lab business education

Today’s laboratory professionals must possess acumen in a broad range of areas from clinical excellence, to health systems’ delivery, to patient services. Now, with pressures mounting to streamline operations, boost productivity, and even evolve from a cost center to a revenue driver, state-of-the-art management techniques are quickly becoming yet another required skill for today’s laboratory manager.

From spearheading educational forums to leveraging strategic partnerships, Bayer Diagnostics has made management education for laboratory professionals its latest knowledge-based offering. Laboratory professionals can now choose from a host of educational tools on a range of management topics. And based on the encouraging response from laboratory professionals across the United States, the company plans to continue expanding its curriculum.

Educating lab managers through strategic partnerships

In one of several educational initiatives Bayer is sponsoring, the company is joining forces with CLMA (Clinical Laboratory Management Association) to provide business education to the association’s 5,300 laboratory professionals.

“There are so many pressing issues on which lab managers must be actively educated. By partnering with CLMA, we are working with a trusted educational source to deliver business-management information to lab professionals,” says Jack Kenny, vice president of marketing for Bayer Diagnostics.

“CLMA’s mission is to be the resource for laboratory management professionals, arming them with the tools and skills they need to position themselves as leaders within their healthcare institutions,” says Charlie Fenstermaker, director of corporate relations for CLMA. “We are very excited to partner with Bayer Diagnostics to jointly develop programs and curriculum to support our mission.”

Regulatory issues key to top laboratory performance

With legal, regulatory, and compliance issues becoming increasingly complex, CLMA and Bayer made these the top priority of their joint educational initiative. At CLMA’s annual conference “ThinkLab ’06,” to be held in Charlotte next March, Bayer will lead a panel discussion entitled “Ethical Relationships between Lab Managers and Vendors.”

This three-hour information session will focus on newly issued compliance and regulatory rules, including discussion of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 to help ensure that manufacturers and laboratory executives clearly understand the new legal environment and how to continue to run their lab business while keeping up with ever-changing regulations.

A second topic is the Code of Ethics on Interactions with Health Care Professionals. The AdvaMed voluntary code of ethics became effective Jan. 4, 2004, and aims to facilitate members’ ethical interactions in the workplace. ThinkLab ’06 will cover these topics, including helping laboratory managers understand the rules on member-sponsored training and education, sales and promotional meetings, arrangements with consultants, and gifts. The training session will be available on videotape for those unable to attend ThinkLab ’06.

“The ThinkLab compliance seminar has taken all of the recent news on the legal, regulatory, and compliance fronts and designed an educational module for lab professionals around them,” says Kenny. Using the experience of several top manufacturers’ and a large hospital system’s compliance officers, and a former government prosecutor, this seminar promises to provide a sound introduction to the process of managing the complexities of compliance.

Building a better laboratory business

For years, lab managers have been tasked with running an efficient business. They have worked hard to meet and exceed expectations by providing timely, quality results to their customers. Today, however, many labs are being asked to go much further — to help transition the lab from a cost center to a profit generator for their hospital/health system. This year, CLMA and Bayer also teamed up to develop a workshop designed to help lab executives run a better lab business. A daylong educational forum, Bayer Days, was developed and includes another management-based instruction for laboratory professionals. The topics include:
• Earning Your Hospital’s Investment Dollars;
• Maximizing Your Lab’s Business Opportunities;
• Efficient Use of Labor; and
• Business Planning For Your Laboratory.

For these sessions, Bayer gathers top experts and showcases best practices on such important topics as how to develop a proposal to hospital administrators and how to develop and refine laboratory processes in order to demonstrate or create value. A key focus of this workshop is to provide tools that lab-management professionals can use to help them build their business. Bayer Days will once again cover business-management techniques in its 2006 series. CLMA and Bayer will also increase the ability for people to attend by extending these types of seminars to some regional CLMA events in 2006.

On-the-job training
Lab professionals who enjoy time away from the lab for educational sessions may also want their learning to continue once they are back to work. That is why the third element of the company’s laboratory education curriculum, Bayer University, is a Web-based curriculum offering more than 200 course offerings, including detailed clinical education.

Some course examples offered through Bayer University include personal development courses like Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint presentation skills, and business writing. Management-level courses are also offered, such as time management, planning your day, creating a productive workforce, and managing high performers. Courses can be easily purchased with a credit card online at www.bayeruniversity.com, or can be set up in advance through Bayer.

“These online courses allow laboratory managers or employees to train in a virtual university environment, at their own pace,” says Henry Park, director of Bayer Diagnostics’ innovations services. “As a result of these webinars, managers and employees no longer need to adjust their schedules for training. Students can access these courses and interact with the instructors and other students at their convenience, from any location.”

Banking on knowledge
Laboratories, while a cornerstone of modern healthcare today, tend to be viewed as discrete operations — and often as cost centers. If laboratory managers become actively involved in educating themselves and their laboratory staff on management techniques, they can transform their laboratories into profit centers and, thus, provide a dramatic example for other departments. Productivity enhancements that succeed in the laboratory can be rolled into other “process-oriented” centers within the hospital, such as ER and outpatient services and, ultimately, adopted throughout the institution. As more hospitals and health systems follow the course, much of the costs and waste that burden the healthcare industry can be successfully managed — as they have long been in other industries.

ThinkLab ’06 scholarships available
The Lyle Rosser, Jr. Continuing Education Scholarship, created at BD, commemorates the legacy of its namesake. Rosser, a CLMA member who embodied a love of education, believed that every laboratory professional should have the opportunity for continuing education [see MLO, February 2005, p. 32, “CE scholarships promote learning” for interviews with past recipients].

These generous scholarships include registration, travel, lodging, and meals for the duration of the conference — and each offers its recipient the chance to attend the industry’s premier educational conference; to gather the insights and knowledge to keep up to date with the latest trends and technology within the industry; and to interact with a wide range of attendees and exhibitors.

Ten scholarships are available through the auspices of BD to CLMA’s ThinkLab ’06 Conference & Exhibition in Charlotte, NC, being held March 18-21, 2006, for laboratory professionals who may not otherwise have the financial resources to attend. The full applications are available within the ThinkLab ’06 website at www.clmathinklab.org/files/attendee/LyleR osserScholarshipApplication.pdf, and may be sent by the Jan. 6, 2006, deadline with the requested documents to CLMA. If you have specific questions, please contact CLMA’s Educational Program Design Manager, Jennifer Miller, at jmiller@clma.org.