

Medical Laboratory Professionals Week

Medical Laboratory Professionals Week starts is the final week of April, and those in the lab at Lawrence County Memorial Hospital will be making the most of it.

“It’s a long-standing, fun week for lab professionals,” said Joy Wesley, the hospital’s laboratory manager. “It gives us a chance to toot our own horns and it lets everyone know that we’re out here. I’m not sure everyone even knows what a lab professional is.”

The week originated in 1975 as National Medical Laboratory Week. It’s had a number of sponsors throughout the years, and is currently coordinated by a collaborative committee with representatives from 17 national clinical laboratory organizations. It’s now in its 44th year.

“We’ll be doing a lot of fun games in the lab, amongst ourselves,” Wesley said. “Sometimes, we’ll even take a game out into the hallway and let the patients get involved.”

Prizes, such as gift cards from local businesses, are usually available to the winners. In addition, special T-shirts are sometimes ordered for the week.

Another highlight is a carry-in meal for the members of the department.

“That’s always nice,” said Wesley. “It’s good to just take half-an-hour away from everything, eat, and enjoy each other’s company.”

The lab at Lawrence County Memorial Hospital consists of 16 employees, 10 of whom are full time, including Wesley. There are phlebotomists, who collect the samples from patients and process the bulk of the paperwork. There are also members of the technical staff, who are responsible for completing the testing of blood, urine, stool and other samples.

The lab at the Lawrence County hospital is open around the clock for hospital patients, and those who visit the emergency room. For those who need lab services on an outpatient basis, the hours are from 6:30 a.m. until 10 p.m.

Results of many of the tests can be determined on site. Others are delivered to a reference laboratory on a daily basis, through a courier.

“We can take an order from any physician,” Wesley said. “And from any specialist, an outpatient order can be brought in. I think a lot of people really don’t realize that.”

Wesley says those who work in the lab “enjoy making a difference.”

“We’re very involved in the diagnosis of the patient,” said Wesley, a four-year employee of the hospital. “A big part of the doctor’s diagnosis is based upon the laboratory test. Plus, we enjoy that contact with the patients.”

Wesley notes that jobs are often available in the field, as more medical technicians retire each year than come out of school. Phlebotomists are required to take a one-year training course, the nearest of which is at Olney Central College.

“You’ll be trained in all the proper procedures of drawing blood,” Wesley said.

It takes substantially more schooling to become a technologist. After undergoing three years of training in a program, a fourth year must be spent in “a teaching hospital.” Good Samaritan Hospital in Vincennes is the nearest such facility, and it accepts only six students annually.

“Your entire senior year will be spent there, working in a lab, five days a week, eight hours a day,” Wesley said. “It’s a one-year rotation. You go in Aug. 1 and you graduate July 31.”

It’s also possible to become a technologist by earning a bachelor’s in life science or microbiology, and then being “grandfathered in” to the program at Vincennes, according to Wesley.

Those who need lab work done can speak with someone in the department by contacting the hospital at (618)-943-1000.