

# More Medical Laboratory Technologists needed

by Heidi Riley

Health Sector

Medical Laboratory Technologists are the third-largest healthcare profession in Canada, after doctors and nurses. “There is a big demand for MLTs right now, which will only become more acute as the years go by,” says **Carolyn McCarville** of the **PEI Society of Medical Technology**.

## What is fueling the demand for more MLTs?

“Fifty percent of Laboratory Technologists in Canada will be eligible to retire by 2016,” says Carolyn. “We need to get more people interested in this occupation now. They need time to train and get experience so when more MLTs retire, there will not be a more serious shortage.”

As our population ages, more people are getting more medical tests. “That puts more pressure on the lab.”

## Job description

MLTs work in hospitals, private laboratories, research facilities, and vet colleges. They analyze blood, body fluids and tissues for proteins, hormones, and other elements. These test results are very important: 85 percent of a doctor’s diagnosis is based on the results of laboratory tests.

Technologists are trained in five disciplines: **Biochemistry, Hematology, Microbiology, Histotechnology, and Blood Transfusion**. “Most who work in a large lab like the QEH work in specific disciplines,” says Carolyn. “Technologists in smaller labs often work in several areas. In a bigger lab, positions are more specialized.”

## How many MLTs work on PEI?

“Between 100 and 110 MLTs work on PEI,” says Carolyn. “Techs must be certified by the **Canadian Society of Medical Laboratory Science** and are encouraged to be members of the **PEI Society of Medical Technology**.”

## Training

Two schools in the Maritimes offer MLT training: **New Brunswick Community College in Saint John**, and **Nova Scotia Community College in Dartmouth**. These diploma programs run two to three years. High school credits in biology, chemistry, physics and math are needed to apply.

**Medical Laboratory Technologist Carolyn McCarville in the lab at the QEH in Charlottetown. Behind her is the most commonly-used machine in the lab. It analyzes blood by doing white blood cell and platelet count and analyzing hemoglobin.**



## Career paths

“There’s tons of job opportunities on PEI and across Canada,” says Carolyn. “The designation is transferrable, and you can work in other countries as well.”

“On PEI, new hires might start as a **Lab Tech 1** and then can move up to **Level 2** with a few more duties such as troubleshooting and quality control. Positions requiring more experience include **Laboratory Specialist** or **Chief Technologist**. You need to have the experience, and you need to keep up with continuing education. Refresher and technical courses are offered by the **Canadian Society of Medical Laboratory Science**.”

## Working conditions

MLTs are on their feet all day, have good manual dexterity, visual colour discrimination, a keen eye for detail, good organizational and time management skills and good judgement and decision-making ability. They need to be able to handle a fast pace and high stress.

Shift work is part of the job. The QEH lab is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and must be staffed around the clock.

## Wages

According to [www.labourmarketinformation.ca](http://www.labourmarketinformation.ca) Medical Laboratory Technologists on PEI earn between \$19.45 and \$29.25 per hour.

## Why did Carolyn choose this career?

Carolyn has been an MLT for four years. “I chose this career after the TV show **CSI** came out. Seeing people working in the lab was pretty cool. I always liked healthcare, but I didn’t want to be a nurse and I really wasn’t suited to be a doctor. While in high school, I went to a career fair and met a technologist who works at the hospital. The career sounded perfect for me. I love that combination of science and healthcare. I can’t imagine sitting behind a desk in a 9 to 5 job. With this job, I’m always moving and always learning about new technologies and new diseases.”

## What do I like best about the job?

“I get a great deal of satisfaction knowing that my work helps doctors decide on a patient’s treatment and prognosis,” says Carolyn. “I take pride in that. When testing someone’s blood, I am as accurate and careful as possible. I always take as much care as if it was my own relative.”

For more information, visit [www.peismt.org](http://www.peismt.org)

Check out the **Canadian Society of Medical Laboratory Science** at [www.csmls.org](http://www.csmls.org)

To check job listings for healthcare positions, visit [www.gov.pe.ca/jobs](http://www.gov.pe.ca/jobs) and click on **Health Career Opportunities**.

For more information about healthcare careers on PEI, visit [www.healthjobspei.ca](http://www.healthjobspei.ca)

Get more information from the **PEI Health Sector Council** at 367-4463 or visit [www.peihsc.ca](http://www.peihsc.ca)

[www.employmentjourney.com](http://www.employmentjourney.com)

