

Meet the Laboratorian – Jolene Smith

Compiled by Josh Rowland, State Training Coordinator, NPHL

Jolene Smith, MT(ASCP)SM, is the Microbiology Supervisor at Faith Regional Health Services in Norfolk, Nebraska. Faith Regional Health Services is a 166-bed acute care facility founded in 1923 that serves over 100,000 people within a 75-mile radius in northeastern Nebraska. Jolene will be celebrating her 30th anniversary as a laboratorian.



What got you interested in pursuing a career in laboratory science?

In high school, I really enjoyed chemistry and biology courses, even though there were limited classes offered! I always was interested in the medical field and my high school guidance counselor encouraged me to look into medical technology.

Where did you attend medical technology school?

I attended Wayne State College and took my year of internship at St. Luke's Medical Center in Sioux City, Iowa. My specialty in microbiology was attained in 1991.

How long have you worked in your present location?

I have worked in the laboratory for several commercial companies such as Pathology Medical Services, Nichols Institute, Corning Clinical Laboratories, and Quest Diagnostics. For the past 30 years, I have been employed with Norfolk hospital laboratories which became part of Faith Regional Health Services in 2002. During my time with the hospital laboratories, I started as a generalist and subsequently I took the position of microbiology supervisor in 2002.

Are there any specific areas of microbiology that you have expertise or interest?

I feel my biggest area of expertise is in plate reading, which I love. Since I am in a hospital setting of about 100 beds, I have the opportunity to work on the bench and still do supervisory work. Using my knowledge every day to produce quality results that will benefit the patient is important to me. Also, when we became part of Faith Regional Health Services, I had the opportunity to do research on new testing methodologies which were brought on-site and to participate in writing new procedures which I have really enjoyed.

What do you see as future challenges for the field of microbiology?

The ability to incorporate molecular methods into the microbiology laboratory in a cost effective way to provide physicians with quality results in an expedited manner. Also, the shortage of technologists can impact areas such as the microbiology laboratory which is highly dependent on the expertise of the technologist and less on automation than some other areas of the laboratory.

What is the biggest challenge you face in your job today?

One of my biggest challenges is to keep up with the advancements made in technology and making sure the best, yet most cost effective products or systems available are being used. Keeping current with the ever-changing world of antibiotics and with laboratory regulating agencies such as CAP also poses a challenge. Additionally, it is important that technologists are given the quality training needed to keep up with these demands even though time is a limiting factor in the laboratory.

What advice would you give to a first year medical technologist?

Don't get overwhelmed!! Unless you have a strong desire to work in one specialty, starting as a generalist is a great way to explore the different areas of the laboratory. There are many opportunities to grow so it is important to keep an open mind and do not be afraid to ask questions and rely on the expertise from others. I have learned much over the years by practicing this philosophy and I continue to learn today from other laboratory scientists such as Rosa Crook, the Microbiology Supervisor at BryanLGH in Lincoln.

What do you think is the single biggest change in the laboratory since you started?

Definitely the computerization and the application of advanced analyzers, which did not exist when I started my career. Although challenging for me to adapt, both have had a tremendous positive impact on the laboratory.

What do you like most about your job?

No two days or cultures are the same and I like "investigating the unusual". The ability to help a physician in the management of their patient - effectively can really make my day! Also, I find a high sense of enjoyment working with my fellow employees, who are like a second family to me!