

PRESS RELEASE



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Community Goes Behind the Scenes at J.C. Blair's Medical Lab

Huntingdon, PA (5/1/06) – On Sunday, April 23, J.C. Blair Medical Lab opened its doors to allow the public “behind the scenes” for a sneak peak into the lab. Nearly forty community members took advantage of the tour to find out what happens with the variety of specimens that patients provide the lab to diagnose illness and disease.

Using state-of-the-art technology and instrumentation, laboratory professionals help to prevent disease by detecting unknown health problems and by aiding in the diagnosis and treatment of existing conditions by giving accurate, timely test results. Laboratory test results comprise an estimated 70% of the patient’s medical records and are vital to the diagnosis and treatment of illness and disease. Several departments in the lab contribute to the accurate testing with highly knowledgeable staff and procedures.

The first area of the lab on the tour was phlebotomy. The outpatient drawing area is the beginning of a very important process in the lab and an area familiar to many. Quality specimens are collected in this area and appropriately marked to ensure accuracy. The tour then moved to the chemistry department where Laboratory Technologist Gaynell Boor explained how this area analyzes the liquid portion of the blood to help the physician diagnose diabetes, heart attack and diseases of the liver, kidneys, and thyroid.

The hematology department of the lab studies the cellular components of the blood, including white blood cells, red blood cells and platelets. The white blood cells defend against infection. Using a microscope, technologists often study these cells to determine cause of infection.

The tour proceeded to the coagulation department. Lab Technologist Donna Bassler explained how this department analyzes clotting factors in the blood by using the analyzer to mimic a patient’s clotting process. She indicated that this field is rapidly growing with new tests used to evaluate a person’s tendency for clotting problems and diseases.

In the Microbiology Department, Lab Technologist Enid Miller showed a variety of Petri dishes with specimens from the hand, throat, and mouth growing bacteria in them. This department focuses on the infectious diseases of patients, serving an important role in the diagnosis, management, and prevention of these diseases. Using a variety of methods and techniques, this department’s goal is to accurately isolate and identify disease causing microbes – bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites – that may be present in a specimen as quickly as possible.

“I feel very safe knowing all the precautions and measures the staff takes to ensure a quality sample,” said tour guest Melva Whalen.

The tour also led the groups through the blood bank. In this department, patients are tested for their blood types and the presence of antibodies. This department is responsible for testing donated blood against the person needing the blood for a match. Nearly 1000 units of blood are transfused per year through this department.

Members on the tour had the chance to view through a microscope a slide of healthy cells compared to abnormal cells in the Anatomic Pathology department of the lab. This department has two components: cytology, the study of cells, and histology, the study of tissue. Together these two departments work to diagnose malignancies as well as infections.

"I never knew the lab had so many areas," said tour guest Ruth Bryson. "I have only been to the outpatient area for testing. You don't think about all the things they do after they collect the sample. I am glad to have the chance to see and learn all of this."

J.C. Blair has two pathologists that rotate to provide coverage for the department – Dr. Harry Kamerow, M.D., Lab Director and Dr. Gordon Handte, M.D. Their role in the laboratory is to ensure the accuracy of blood tests, urine tests, cultures and other laboratory determinations and ensure the safety of the blood supply processed through the blood bank. A part of the pathologist's day is spent examining tissues acquired through surgery or from a physician's office and identifying the presence or absence of cancer. The pathologist performs fine needle aspirations on patients with accessible lumps or nodules and autopsies as requested by a physician or coroner.

The tour of the lab wrapped up in the clerical staff office where Office Manager Sally Hockenberry offered refreshments to open house guests. The clerical staff is responsible for typing all reports dictated by the pathologist, assisting the pathologist in getting the information needed to diagnose the specimen, and managing the communication with the physicians' offices, billing department and medical records.

"We are proud of the work we do," said Audrey Houck, Administrative Lab Director. "We have to be painstakingly meticulous in performing our jobs to provide dependable answers for patients."

J.C. Blair recognizes the vital role these professionals play in every aspect of health care and thanks them for their hard work during National Lab Week and every day of the year.

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Photo caption: Enid Miller explains the growth and identification process to tour guest Margaret Blanck in the Microbiology Department of the Lab.