Who Am I?

DOI: 10.1309/LM6JDEFZ0K8BC5JY

I, or someone like me, have touched you hundreds of times, but you never saw me, never felt me. I give you hope, provide joy, and unfortunately, deliver bad news. I am never there to share in your excitement or comfort you in your times of sorrow. However, I still feel these emotions from a distance.

I am a Medical Laboratory Scientist. I am the one who discovered a pregnancy in the couple who had a slim hope of ever bearing a child but was not there to “high-five” them. I gave closure to thousands of families of the 9/11 disaster by identifying the remains of their loved ones but was not there to share their tears. I personally discovered a terrorist’s weapon of choice, Anthrax, but could not bask in the limelight.

I performed the tumor marker tests that helped in the diagnosis of cancer in your father, mother, spouse, or other family member early enough for a successful recovery or at least in time for them to wrap up loose ends.

I recognized when you needed more iron, less medication, and a better diet. I tested your serum for hepatitis markers and for HIV antibodies. I identified the organism that was causing your infection and the antimicrobials that would be effective in treating it. I identified the HLA markers in a donor that provided a perfect match for the stem cell transplant you so desperately needed. I supply most of the evidence your physician uses to diagnose your ills. My tasks are limitless, but always behind the scenes. I am a vital part of the healthcare team and make substantial contributions to your diagnosis and treatment. But I never get to tell you so.

Karen Gordon
President, Virginia Society for Clinical Laboratory Science

The laboratory community is a large, critical component of the health care industry. Our role in the delivery of health care is a dramatic one. We play a vital role in the detection, diagnosis, and treatment of disease, spanning the continuum of health care. Laboratory tests serve as the foundation for the diagnosis and management of conditions like cardiac disease, HIV, cancer, diabetes, kidney disease, and infectious diseases. Laboratory test results impact up to 70% of all critical decisions related to patient care.