

## Why Obtain the SBB Certification?

By Virginia Reyes M.Ed., MT(ASCP)SBB<sup>CM</sup> IRL Medical Technologist at Carter BloodCare, Bedford, TX

A special thank you to Sandy Wortman MT(ASCP)SBB<sup>CM</sup> IRL Director at Carter BloodCare, Bedford, TX

Many MLS students are not encouraged or given the appropriate education regarding the benefits of getting certified in a specialist area upon completion of the MLS program. Sometimes the MLS learns about a specialty area through colleagues years after graduation and now has anywhere from a few to several years of experience. At this point in their career the MLS may wonder if obtaining a specialty such as the Specialist in Blood Banking (SBB) is worth it. They may already be in a supervisor, manager, or director position with the MLS (ASCP) certification and no additional education beyond the BS degree is required by their employer.

Sometimes the MLS does know about the SBB certification and desires to obtain it. However, life gets in the way and they never pursue it due to the lack of additional time to get another certification. Other people have heard about it but just have no desire to put in the added effort required. They are happy where they are, and that is okay with their goals in life. This article is meant to be directed to those in the MLS field who are even remotely thinking about the SBB certification and pondering why one should obtain it.

A nonscientific survey was conducted by me to determine why those who were certified obtained it in the first place. Interestingly, those I interviewed who were certified for a longer period of time made the decision to get certified because they wanted to learn more in the immunohematology field. Their frustration at “not knowing what to do next” drove them to the SBB certification. The knowledge obtained gave them the advanced tools to go beyond basic procedures in daily workups. They were taught how to find answers and perform complex analytical workups. Along that same line of thought, others with whom I spoke with were “trainers” of new employees and desired to be better at that part of their job. The responses indicated that it was a personal goal with personal rewards.

Another group of relatively recent SBBs obtained the certification to advance their career and current job position, and of course that meant a potential for a pay increase. The driving force in this situation is the increased responsibility with career advancement, which means the MLS needs the knowledge to get the promotion and thus the pay increase. This person is prepared to accept the promotion when the opportunity arises. In some cases the SBB certification allowed them to receive a pay raise from their employer without a promotion into a management type position solely based on obtaining the advanced skills and knowledge the SBB certification provided.

SBBs of today must have knowledge in serologic and molecular testing, problem solving, quality control/assurance, laboratory operations and donor collection/testing/components. Nearly all MLS graduates have been introduced to these areas; however, in-depth training is lacking. The MLS certification teaches “how” to do the testing whereas the SBB certification teaches the “why” and gives one a deeper understanding of the scope.

There are several routes one can take in obtaining the SBB certification. One way is independent study and challenging the exam based on years of experience in the field. Those who independently study for the exam will attain the knowledge in the aforementioned areas, and those who do pass the SBB certification by independent study are to be commended since only 29% of independent study students pass the SBB exam. Also, these independent study students tend to be highly motivated and dedicated to their goal since no one is there to require that an assignment be submitted.

Attending a structured SBB school and/or online SBB program is another route to obtain SBB certification. This option is best for those who require structure and may want to attend face-to-face classes with the advantage of group discussions and “not suffering through it alone.” The structured formal training can also be obtained online which may or may not have group discussions. In either case, face-to-face or online, the student will be exposed to other aspects of a career in immunohematology. These students may have the opportunity to prepare a formal lesson, give a lecture, write exam questions, participate in research, write a paper about that research, submit the paper for publication, present at a local, regional or national convention, design their own fictional ideal laboratory, shadow a blood bank manager/director, or visit other blood centers and industry manufacturers to get a behind the scenes view. These opportunities are available to anyone, but an SBB Program Director can make these activities a requirement and assist the student in organizing these activities with local contacts. These added learning experiences are made easier to obtain for the SBB student than the average MLS.

Obtaining a specialty certification demonstrates that you have made an effort to learn more in a specific area of the field and that you want to increase your knowledge and advance your career. It also allows you to promote the field of Immunohematology, a little known area to the average person on the street. Yes, it will take some time and effort to prepare for the SBB exam, as offered by the ASCP, but it will be worth the effort to reach that goal you may have always been thinking about.

SCABB, in partnership with BCW Versiti, will be offering the ***SBB Exam Last Chance Review*** continuing education event opportunity on March 25-26, 2017 on site at Carter BloodCare located in Bedford, Texas or via webinar. The ***SBB Exam Last Change Review*** is an excellent resource of multiple topic areas and information necessary for review if someone is thinking about attempting to take or challenge the SBB Exam. It is also an excellent refresher course for anyone needing additional help in Transfusion Medicine. Also, one will be able to obtain up to 16 hours of PACE credits upon completion of the ***SBB Exam Last Chance Review*** course. Or, if neither of those options works for you, one can obtain the handouts from SCABB for a slight fee. Please consider utilizing one of these excellent resources offered via the SCABB website for brushing up on your Immunohematology knowledge and examination preparation.

Reference: [www.ascp.org](http://www.ascp.org)