

CMPT Participates in International Conference on PT/EQA Standards, Madrid, Spain—May 2006

Michael A. Noble, Chair and Managing Director CMPT

It is a common trait that we all think that how we do something is the way it is done, or that it is the right way to do it. An international conference of Proficiency Testing providers, External Quality Assessment scheme providers, and Accreditation Bodies brought to light that it is a little more complicated than that. For three years, this group has been meeting to find the areas of common ground between the many different providers of quality assessment challenges, reference materials suppliers, and the accreditation bodies that in some instances base laboratory accreditations on the laboratories use of the materials.

Now, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) have guidelines for the specific management of PT and EQA bodies. These documents are ISO

Guide 43-1:1997 (*Proficiency Testing by Interlaboratory Comparisons -- Testing Schemes*) and ILAC Guide G-13:2000 (*Guidelines for the Requirements for the Competence of Providers of Proficiency Testing Schemes*). Two other documents that are sometimes used to demonstrate the quality of these programs are also both administered by ISO. Some programs that are operated through laboratories are accredited to another ISO Standard ISO 17025:2005 (*General Requirements for the Competence of Calibration and Testing Laboratories*). Others, including CMPT, are certified to the primary ISO standard for Quality Management in all sectors ISO 9001:2000 (*Quality Management Systems – Requirements*).

For two very long days in May, the international community met together in Madrid to create a new standard those providers can expect to meet. Once created, this standard will be a significant update to ISO Guide 43-1, and will be given an official standards number and title ISO/IEC 17043.

This process, supported by 22 countries, ensures that the two updated guideline documents mentioned above can modernize and incorporate all the key elements of all the other documents. At that point all accredited accrediting bodies (yes, even accrediting bodies need to be accredited to their own ISO standard ISO 17011 - *Conformity assessment -- General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment*

bodies) should be able to require that the PT/EQA partners that work with them meet international requirements and expectations.

The PT/EQA community in Canada is not small. Including the variety of disciplines, there are approximately 20 PT/EQA providers in Canada. Three of them participated in this international effort: Canadian Association for Environmental Analytical Laboratories (CAEAL), Quality Management Program – Laboratory Services Ontario (QMP-LS), and CMPT. Currently, we all believe that we can and do meet all or most of the requirements as they now stand.

“...what providers provide is as diverse as the communities they serve.”

This process is more challenging than first meets the eye, because what providers provide is as diverse as the communities they serve.

Some are dealing with biological materials, including some bio-medical materials. For others the materials are more inert as they include laboratories that assess organic and inorganic compounds in soil. Others assess detection of electrical artifacts. A standard that will address management issues, technical issues, safety issues, stability issues, and analysis of results including assessment of uncertainty for a broad and diverse range of challenges will be a challenge all of its own.

For CMPT this is an interesting journey. We approach the matter for its own sake; we are involved because we know that adherence to international standards makes us a better program, and provides us with a platform to promote quality management in the medical laboratory. In part, it is and always has been, a demonstration project. If we can go the journey, then we expect all our quality partners to do the same. We expect it, the laboratories expect it, and the public, in all its guises, we suspect pretty much expects it as well.

As the process transpires, we will keep you up to date first with CMPT's participation to create the standard, and then our path to meeting the standard through formal accreditation.

[Ed. note: CMPT is certified to ISO 9001:2000, and meets all the requirements of ILAC G13:2000 and ISO Guide 43-1:1997.]