

Montana Laboratory News

SUMMER 2020



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Kelly Amidei

2nd Year:

Michele Adams



6 MONTHS... FEELS LIKE 6 YEARS

Thank you ASCLS-MT for a year full of immense support and loads of patience. This past 6 months have felt more like a year. Oddly, in some instances it feels like I was standing in the eye of the storm not daring to move. In contrast, the instant I'd step outside for work each day, I felt like I was tossed out into the storm-just hoping to make it through that day. I've been trying to catch up ever since both personally and professionally. It's a weird combination of life and work that I've struggled with since the pandemic, as I'm sure you all are as well. Being an essential worker means life is moving at a break-neck pace. On the other end of the spectrum home seems like it's suspended in time. One small piece of life frozen where the only things moving forward are the hours and the seasons.

I found myself struggling this year to keep up with ASCLS but also knowing that our members needed us now more than ever. I imagine you are all struggling with similar situations and my goal is to continue to support our members and our new state President throughout this next year. We hope to come out of this with a stronger society than we've ever had.

The laboratory has been in the spotlight this last year in an unprecedented way. I know that the pull of work and ASCLS is often due to this very factor. We have the chance of a lifetime and we need to make sure we don't miss it. As you can imagine our goals shifted dramatically during this year as an organization. I know I drifted far from the course I hoped to follow. I've come to accept that and hope that each decision I've made would provide as much support as possible to our members. I hope this support allows you to step out in your organization and community to advocate for the laboratory. Lab testing is on the world's stage right now and although it's fraught with issues currently, we have to share the story of the lab pre-pandemic as well. Our stories will help legislators, employers, and other healthcare workers understand our workforce shortage, the importance of laboratory professionals, and the need for this highly specialized profession to be protected. This organization has been instrumental for me throughout my career and this pandemic. I encourage everyone to use all the resources we have and get involved. If you have experiences to share, resources or protocols that we all know we all need, supply chain ideas, an itch to volunteer or supportive words, share them! Share our posts on Facebook, find articles highlighting the truths behind the laboratory testing and get them to your physicians, send information to your administration about lab issues before they come to you. Get out there and show them what we do. We know we'll make it through this, laboratorians know how to get going when the going gets tough, let's make sure everyone else knows it too!

Respectfully signing off, Cara Bushmaker ASCLS-MT Past-President

ASCLS-MT 2019-2020 in Review:

- 2019 IMSS in Jackson Hole, WY was a great success. Many of our state board members and society members joined us for a great meeting. Montana always shows up and is instrumental in planning this great meeting every year.

-The new board met for the first time in the Fall and we planned out our gameplan for the year. (Oh how little we knew then :)) We approved a new strategic plan, discussed our new bylaws changes, and brainstormed new candidates for possible board nominees.

-At the same time, our new interns for the 2019-2020 Region VIII Leadership Academy were gearing up for a succesful new year. Our interns from Montana were Dani Bodeker and Tiffany Ashworth. They worked hard and dealt with so many challenges navigating such a big commitment and doing it throughout the pandemic. The leadership academy chooses a project at the beginning of their year at IMSS. This year's class chose an electronic volunteer process that you can check out on our [Get Involved](#) tab on the Montana website at www.ascls-mt.org AND also on the regional level at [Get Involved](#) on the website at www.asclsregion8.com. If you have a chance to congratulate these two, they deserve it for an awesome job! This new feature will allow a year-round way for our members to reach out connect and jump in to volunteer! Such a great new addition!

-Throughout the fall we helped coordinate volunteers to start planning our state meeting and we worked on contacts for new board positions.

-As 2020 dawned and rumblings of SARS-CoV-2 started to surface we forged ahead prepping for a state meeting in Missoula. By February the pull to keep our members safe was too much and we started prepping for a cancellation. By mid-March we had cancelled our meeting, the catering, speakers and all the vendors mere weeks ahead of lock-down across most of the country.

-Then we waited, and discussed and called emergency ZOOM meetings trying to wrap our heads around other options. After a couple talks and some amazing support, we switched gears to plan a virtual state meeting with no guide and no roadmap. For all of you that joined us, we hope you enjoyed and it that we pulled it off smoothly. Our new MMLS seniors gave presentations that were the highlight of our meeting. We had great vendor support and were able to hold our annual general business meeting and elect new officers.

-We really paved the way as we were one of the first and only states to switch to a virtual meeting. A framework that ASCLS national mimicked for our Annual Meeting in June this year. They had >800 virtual attendees and tons of CE. The meeting could have been postponed but all the work and ingenuity goes to show just how amazing and resilient laboratory professionals are. I couldn't be more proud of our organization this year. When the times are tough you truly find out what you are made of and I'm really proud of what ASCLS is made of. Thank you all for an amazing year and for all the support.

-The move of many meetings to virtual gave us the push we've really been needing to connect with our members more online. We hope to offer virtual events throughout the year as an option during tougher travel times and winter weather. We also added an instagram account and a twitter account. Please support our pages and follow us to get the latest real-time updates and communication. We look forward to see you all on the line ;)

-Lastly Nationals is communicating and providing information like never before. Make sure you utilize the info. This past year members have had free CE webinars, amazing online content through ASCLS Today and the ASCLS e-newsbytes e-newsletter. Our advocacy is stronger than ever even with Legislative Symposium being canceled. The website is full of ideas anywhere from planning for Lab Week to contacting your legislators with white papers and research to illuminate the issues. The momentum of this pandemic has pushed us to new heights and we can't wait to see where it take us this next year!

Don't miss out. Renew your membership today. Check out the institutional memberships. Talk to your workplace about ASCLS. Let's move the laboratory out of the shadows. #WeSaveLivesEveryday

Here's to another year of fighting for science in the best place to quarantine on the planet!

LONGEVITY AWARDS

5 years Kati Visser Michele Adams Adam Birks	20 years Holly Weinberg Debra Berg	15 years Tom Olding Amy Steinmetz Sherri Nichols Connie Sessions
	40 years Rhonda Craver	
	45 years Donna Rudiger	

NATIONAL OMICRON SIGMA:

Joni Gilstrap Holly Weinberg Susie Zanto

REGIONAL OMICRON SIGMA:

Abbey Wichman - Cara Bushmaker -Joni Gilstrap - Holly Weinberg
Ashlee Ketchum - Susie Zanto - Dani Bodeker - Tiffany Ashworth - Michele Adams

STATE OMICRON SIGMA AWARDS:

Abbey Wichman-Cara Bushmaker-Holly Weinberg-Tori Rensink-Joni Gilstrap
Michele Adams-Kay Rasmussen-Sadie Arnold-Amanda Done-Tiffany Ashworth
Dani Bodeker-Susie Zanto



**2020
KEYS
TO**

**THE
FUTURE**

1. Dani Bodeker

2. Michele Adams

3. Tiffany Ashworth

Stay Distant but Connected All Year Long!

As members of ASCLS one of your most valuable resources is the [ASCLS Connect Community](https://connect.ascls.org)! Each year you can customize your member community to receive email updates regarding our state society news/ updates, any laboratory specialty of interest, and hot topics in the laboratory world. Stay connected to our membership across the US and across our big sky state. The most resources are at our fingertips via the [Connect Community](https://connect.ascls.org), download the app today.

ASCLS Connect Community and Mobile App

Connect through the Online Community
at connect.ascls.org

Download a New App to Access the Connect Community on Your Mobile Device

Convenient. The app keeps you logged in, making the entire Connect Community (and all its functions) just an icon away.

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Fun!



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Results Direct

Social

To download the app:

1. Go to the [Google Play store](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.ascls.membercentric) or the [Apple App Store](https://apps.apple.com/us/app/membercentric-results-direct/id1444444444) and download the MemberCentric app.

2. Search for ASCLS when prompted to "Find your organization."

INSTALL

3. Log in using your credentials for your ASCLS member account.

**KEEP
YOUR
EYES
PEELED
FOR
THESE
SUSPECTS**

WANTED

Isolates of:

- Salmonella spp.*
- Toxigenic *Escherichia coli* or STEC positive broths
- Shigella spp.*
- Campylobacter spp.* or EIA positive specimens
- Listeria spp.*
- Vibrio spp.*
- Neisseria gonorrhea*
- Invasive *Neisseria meningitidis*
- Invasive *Haemophilus influenzae*
- Bordetella pertussis*
- Suspected VISA, VRSA, CRE
- Drug Resistant *S. pneumoniae*
- Isolates with Unusual Resistance Patterns
- Outbreak Associated Organisms

Must Be Taken Alive!

Submit (at no cost to you) to:
MT Public Health Laboratory

Questions? Call 800-821-7284



COVID-19 Resources

[Expanded State Courier Schedule as of 3-24-20](#)

Toll free number: 1-800-821-7284

Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Laboratory Courier Service

Spokane Courier Services, LLC provides courier service for the Laboratory Services Bureau.

In response to testing for COVID-19, we are offering expanded courier service, which includes extra sites Monday through Friday and Saturday pickup at our regular weekend sites. Please consult the schedule below to see the facilities and pickup times, and have your samples to the location at least 30 minutes prior to the scheduled pickup time. Also, be advised this is the same courier who picks up for LabCorp, so please ensure that samples for the state are packaged separately and marked appropriately.

If you do not have access to these sites, call MTPHL if you would like a prepaid UPS label. If you will be driving a sample, please call so we can make arrangements to receive your sample at our laboratory.

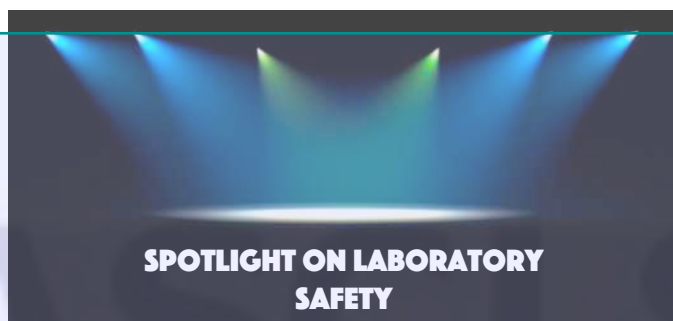
Samples sent through the courier should be packaged separately from other samples, in an insulated box to maintain cold condition. Please call the Public Health Laboratory at 1-800-821-7284 with any questions.



MONTANA
COMMUNICABLE
DISEASE EPIDEMIOLOGY

Keep up to date on the latest COVID-19 case counts, hospitalizations, and active cases by county. The state laboratory has expanded hours 7 days a week. Watch for updates via email!

[Montana Response-COVID-19](#)



Laboratory Safety in the times of COVID-19 can be challenging, but vitally important. OSHA has recently published a FAQ page focused on masks, face coverings, and respirators. There has been much confusion about the value and uses of this PPE. Click [here](#) to see the FAQ page.

Courtesy of Dan The Lab Safety Man, Inc. info@danthelabsafetyman.com

2020 AWARDEES:

The following awards were presented at the 2020 Virtual Awards Ceremony held on Zoom on April 18, 2020.

Member of the Year:

Cara Bushmaker

Student Member of the Year:

Hailey Liss

(This award was sponsored by Xtant Medical)

Student Presentation of the Year:

Sarah Sanchez *Creating an MIC Guide*

(This award was sponsored by Western Microscopes)

EXTRA EXTRA!

READ ALL ABOUT ASCLS-MT, COVID-19, AND WORKFORCE IMPACTS



FROM OUR VERY OWN LAB MANAGERS



Mark Lubbers, MBA, ASCP

Director of Laboratory
Billings Clinic

- 1. What is your biggest roadblock during the COVID-19 pandemic?** Our biggest roadblock is the availability of testing reagents and the extended turn-around-times of our reference laboratory partners.
- 2. Do you think ASCLS-MT has been of value to you in your role previously or during the pandemic?** ASCLS provides a networking opportunity for our laboratory professionals both in terms of professional and social opportunities. Keeping our medical technology professionals engaged in the field and aware of the awesome job they do each and every day has kept our laboratories functioning at high levels over the last several years. The laboratory's role in this pandemic cannot be overstated.
- 3. Have you experienced workforce shortages in the past 1, 5, or 10 years?** We have experienced workforce shortages over the last twenty plus years.
- 4. Do you train MLS/MLT students at your facility? And if so, what are the sacrifices?** We train two MLS students per year; the technologists who train staff at the bench are constantly pulled in multiple directions and ultimately are the staff who sacrifice the most.
- 5. What could ASCLS do to provide more benefit to your facility?** I would like to see annual wage survey information and improved job posting opportunity.
- 6. What is a positive you have learned this past year?** The laboratory is more visible now than ever before; I think physicians, nurses, and administration have always known about the laboratory, but I believe they have a new-found understanding/respect for laboratory professionals.

Terri Benedict, CLS, MT(ASCP)

Laboratory Director

NORTH VALLEY HOSPITAL

1. What is your biggest roadblock during the COVID-19 pandemic? Biggest Road Block is lack of ability to get testing. I got a GenMark and get 72 tests per week. Trying to get a Cepheid and I am in the que for 6 months down the road or something crazy like that.

2. Do you think ASCLS-MT has been of value to you in your role previously or during the pandemic? ASCLS helps to build relationships that become very valued and helpful. Provides great information.

3. Have you experienced workforce shortages in the past 1, 5, or 10 years? I have had some shortages with night shift positions and have successfully filled them with traveler positions that eventually stayed on to fill the permanent position. I have some openings now due to retirements but I am getting a lot of applications and we have our CLS and MLT students who are helping to fill positions.

4. Do you train MLS/MLT students at your facility? And if so, what are the sacrifices? Yes we have CLS and MLT students, staff have someone to train all the time along with doing normal workload. It is great to have students but can be stressful for the staff. There is no compensation for staff who train like a preceptor bonus or anything. We have preceptor pay if we are training a new employee but we cannot use it for training our students. Having students does pay off when you can hire them into open positions.

5. What is a positive you have learned this past year? With the Pandemic there are continual changes, added workflow, stressed out staff, providers, etc. I try to just take each day one day at a time and I laugh a lot. Letting the stress get to you will not help the situation. I have seen staff really step up to the plate to manage change and added work....they are knocking it out of the park. I am really proud of them. It is amazing how people will rise to the occasion and come together to help others out.



Ashlee Ketchum, MS-CLS, MLS(ASCP)

Laboratory Manager

Holy Rosary Healthcare

1. What is your biggest roadblock during the COVID-19 pandemic? I would say supplies (VTM, swabs, reagent kits, testing platforms that are reliable) and finding a reference lab that had a good TAT.

2. Do you think ASCLS-MT has been of value to you in your role previously or during the pandemic? Yes to some degree in the leadership skills and contacts at other facilities.

Continued....

3. Have you experienced workforce shortages in the past 1, 5, or 10 years? Yes always short one to two persons for the past four years.

4. Do you train MLS/MLT students at your facility? And if so, what are the sacrifices? Yes, stress on my staff, added work to manage them, and disappointment when they don't hire on at the end.

5. What could ASCLS do to provide more benefit to your facility? Keep fighting for us in the political field, especially in the staff shortage area. I honestly don't know what I am going to do in about a year if I don't get someone hired.

6. What is a positive you have learned this past year? We are resourceful and band together as a group when needed. The labs in my system have been great we all supported each other by sharing products and resources . I definitely couldn't have gotten through all of this without them.



Abbey Wichman, MLS(ASCP)^{cm}

Laboratory Manager & Compliance Officer

ASCLS-MT President

Central Montana Medical Center

1. What is your biggest roadblock during the COVID-19 pandemic? I was fortunate/unfortunate enough to be appointed the Logistics Chief on our Incident Command team. This work was time consuming and pulled me from essential tasks in the lab. We had to develop original ways to conserve our PPE supply, yet keep employees safe and protected. We had to establish and maintain a Screening area at entry ways. We had to develop and support a cross training schedule and mandate this from all employees. Finding the time to look at the purchase of an instrument to perform COVID testing was pushed to the back burner. We are so fortunate to have such a wonderful State Public Health Lab, that this relieved me of that burden. They have done an amazing job getting us reliable test results in a timely manner, that I had little desire to bring on a instrument and charge patients for testing (especially knowing that reagent purchase would be near to impossible). However, we did bring on a new PCR respiratory panel on our BioFire that has SARS-CoV-2. Lastly, we have noticed that supplies at multiple levels are difficult to obtain. Lately our micro supplies have been a challenge, but we all know that reagents for COVID testing remain the biggest obstacle.

2. Do you think ASCLS-MT has been of value to you in your role previously or during the pandemic? Always! The network I have gained remains priceless. ASCLS-MT has some phenomenal leaders who have helped mentor me in more ways than one. After going through the Region VIII Leadership Academy, my skills as a Lab manager evolved and progressed to a higher level. The opportunities are there, you just have to be open to them. Also, when I am at my breaking point (especially during COVID), sometimes just reaching out to someone who is going through the same challenges can help greatly. I can honestly say I am a better person for joining the organization and meeting some remarkable people.

3. Have you experienced workforce shortages in the past 1, 5, or 10 years?

We have been fortunate at times with a full staff but we are currently looking to fill 2 FTE slots. I only see this problem getting worse.

Continued....

4. Do you train MLS/MLT students at your facility? And if so, what are the sacrifices? Yes. We have a student from the MMLS program and sometimes we have other students throughout the year as well. The MLT program through Miles City has sent us a student in the past and Online programs have been reaching out as well. CMMC considers itself a Rural Healthcare University and we take students in almost every clinical department. In particular, we have numerous medical students and residents. We know the importance of supporting these clinical rotations and also gain the ability to recruit future prospects to our organization. One sacrifice we make pertains to time. As we all know, laboratories are in a workforce shortage, which is bordering on a crisis. We are not immune to this shortage and this can affect the time we can give to these students in our lab. We want to set these students up for success but it is difficult when you are lacking staff and therefore the time to spend with these students.

5. What could ASCLS do to provide more benefit to your facility? I can see ASCLS helping Montana facilities a great deal. We need the voice of a professional organization at every healthcare facility. My hope is for every facility to have at least one member in ASCLS. Facilities need to encourage active participation in Professional Organizations. Ask this question at interviews! The benefit is limitless for the individual and the organization. Hospitals also need ASCLS help with getting the younger generation interested in this career. ASCLS can help encourage its members and facilities to get out to career fairs or volunteer a day and teach some high school students some basic microbiology, etc.. Give members/facilities these tools and we will use them. "If you build it, they will come." Lastly, our salaries are defined by a wage matrix. This comes from the MHA data from across the state. It looks at larger facilities and smaller facilities and groups them accordingly. We need to continuously remind every healthcare facility of our struggle with staffing and show them the great work Susie Zanto and the Workforce Shortage Task Force did. Labvocate whenever you can!

6. What is a positive you have learned this past year?

There are so many silver linings that I have observed and/or learned through this Pandemic. I have seen the power of teamwork. Cross Training efforts have been strong at our facility and I am impressed by those who have stepped up and cross trained to essential departments. The statement "we are all in this together" rings true in any setting. I also feel I have learned to better deal with different opinions. We are all dealing with this Pandemic differently and the sacrifices are difficult. But being kind to one another can break down any barrier.

Michele Adams MLS (ASCP) Director of Laboratory Service

Marcus Daly Memorial Hospital

1. What is your biggest roadblock during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Initially getting administration to understand what was going to be needed. And then the supply chain came next, followed by the test not being interfaced with our public health system, so the manual process has been a very large time drain on my supervisory staff.

2. Do you think ASCLS-MT has been of value to you in your role previously or during the pandemic?

Yes it does not matter where you are located all laboratories were experiencing the same issues. It is always very beneficial to get best practice and our ASCLS MT group is very experienced and very willing to share best practice.

3. Have you experienced workforce shortages in the past 1, 5, or 10 years?

We did experience a shortage in the last 5 years of which we are just now recovering. Covid has added a new negative impact to this already identified area of shortage with a great need to increase the number of students going into this field.

4. Do you train MLS/MLT students at your facility? And if so, what are the sacrifices?

We have been training site for 2 weeks to meet small rural rotation for MSU and also UND. We did have a student from an Idaho program for 3 months, which we did not feel was adequate, so we will not participate in that rotation unless it is revised. We will be doing our first full internship for MSU and we are looking forward to that. We have a few staff that do not enjoy teaching and that is really unfortunate, so it tends to push the training to the couple that enjoy training and to one of my Technical supervisors. I know when we were dealing with staff shortage and had to use travelers and they were turning over every 13 weeks that all staff was extremely burnt out on training and still trying to get the work completed. So I can only image if you would have had a student or students they would not have had the best experience in that setting.

5. What could ASCLS do to provide more benefit to your facility?

To continue to work to pass the workforce shortage bill that is currently in the house bill, which would help defer college loans if the individual worked in a area of need for up to 3 years. It would also help the facility providing the training to some funding to help offset their cost associated with training individuals.

6. What is a positive you have learned this past year?

That no matter how many tests were issued EUA, that laboratorians continued to go above and beyond trying to document and follow established validation criteria. We were not swayed by the sales pitches of numerous tests, that even though they had received EUA, did not satisfy criteria that we had been educated and trained to look for. No matter how high the stress level has been we did not waiver on doing all would could to provide accurate results for the best patient care and outcomes.



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THE HUNT FOR A VACCINE STARTS IN MONTANA!

LINK TO THE FULL ARTICLE IN NATURE BELOW.

ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine prevents SARS-CoV-2 pneumonia in rhesus macaques

Abstract

Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) emerged in December 2019^{1,2} and is responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic³. Vaccines are an essential countermeasure urgently needed to control the pandemic⁴. Here, we show that the adenovirus-vectored vaccine ChAdOx1 nCoV-19, encoding the spike protein of SARS-CoV-2, is immunogenic in mice, eliciting a robust humoral and cell-mediated response. This response was predominantly Th1, as demonstrated by IgG subclass and cytokine expression profiling. Vaccination with ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 (prime-only and prime-boost regimen) induced a balanced Th1/Th2 humoral and cellular immune response in rhesus macaques. We observed a significantly reduced viral load in bronchoalveolar lavage fluid and lower respiratory tract tissue of vaccinated rhesus macaques challenged with SARS-CoV-2 compared with control animals, and no pneumonia was observed in vaccinated animals. However, there was no difference in nasal shedding between vaccinated and control animals. Importantly, no evidence of immune-enhanced disease following viral challenge in vaccinated animals was observed. Safety, immunogenicity and efficacy of ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 against symptomatic PCR-positive COVID-19 disease will now be assessed in randomized controlled human clinical trials.

Author information

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Friederike Feldmann, Rebecca Rosenke, Dan Long, Jamie Lovaglio, Patrick W. Hanley, Dana Scott & Greg Saturday

ASCLS UPCOMING EVENTS:

1. VIRUTAL 2020 IMSS - October 18-20

Jackson Hole, WY

2. 2021 CLEC - February 25-27

Sheraton Denver Downtown Hotel, Denver, Colorado

3. 2021 Annual Meeting - June 27-July 1

Omni Louisville Hotel, Louisville, KY

Explore the ASCLS-MT website by clicking on the graphic below.



ASCLS-MT IS ON SOCIAL MEDIA...BE SURE TO CHECK US OUT!



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