

Needs Assessment:

**Peer Support Network for Internationally Educated
Medical Laboratory Technologists**

FINAL REPORT

CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR MEDICAL LABORATORY SCIENCE

November 2011
Thinklounge Market Research

Acknowledgements

There are a number of individuals who have played key roles in the research and recommendations set out in this report. The work could not have been completed without the commitment and guidance of Christine Nielsen, Executive Director, Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science and Tania Toffner, Director, Certification and Prior Learning Assessment, Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science.

Special thanks are also due to the numerous internationally educated medical laboratory technologists who participated in the project's focus groups and online survey. The importance of their input and shared experience cannot be overstated and will be of great value to CSMLS and other professions as they endeavour to build stronger supports for internationally educated professionals.

This project is funded by the Government of Canada's Foreign Credential Recognition Program.



The opinions and interpretations in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Executive Summary	4
Introduction.....	6
Methodology.....	7
Literature Review.....	10
Environmental Scan	14
Mentorship Programs.....	16
Peer Support Networks	22
Key Findings of the Literature Review and Environmental Scan.....	25
Findings from Qualitative and Quantitative Studies.....	27
The Case for a Peer Support Network	27
What IEMLTs would like to see in a peer support network	30
Input from IEMLTs on the implementation of a peer support network or mentorship program	32
Recommendations.....	42
Proposed Model	42
Key Policy Issues.....	45
Proposed Implementation Plan	49
Works Cited	50
Appendix A: Focus Group Guide	52
Appendix B: Recruitment Screener for Focus Groups	56
Appendix C: Questionnaire.....	58

Executive Summary

The Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science (CSMLS) recently undertook a project funded by the Government of Canada's Foreign Credential Recognition Program to determine whether internationally educated medical laboratory technologists would benefit from a peer support network to help them navigate the application, assessment, certification, and licensing process and ultimately ease their transition into the workplace. This report summarizes the findings from this project.

A literature review of peer support networks for professionals and particularly internationally educated professionals revealed limited published research on the topic. However, literature comparing and contrasting mentorship and peer support was helpful in understanding the interconnectedness between mentorship and peer support. As a result, the project scope was expanded to include mentorship as well as peer support as possible means of supporting internationally educated medical laboratory technologists. The literature also provided insight into the key factors that can make a peer support network successful which include maintenance of confidentiality and mutual benefit for all parties. Lastly, the research indicated that peer support and mentorship programs typically fall into one of three categories: in-person one-on-one mentorship; online mentorship; and peer support networks.

An environmental scan of twenty-one organizations was conducted and revealed the following key findings: many existing peer support networks for internationally educated professionals are web-based; in some professions peer support networks are embedded in bridging programs; mentors/peer supporters tend to be professionals who have worked in Canada for two or more years and depending on the organization, are either Canadian or internationally-educated; the involvement of a facilitator in both mentorship and peer support networks can lead to better results; few programs are self-sustainable; and the management of privacy varies from organization to organization. Finally, the environmental scan provided further insight into the key factors that contribute to a successful peer support network or mentorship program. As found in the literature review, mutual benefit for all/both parties and confidentiality are key factors. The two other factors demonstrated in the environmental scan are the importance of training the supporter/mentor and having a set of agreed to terms and conditions for those involved in the peer support group or mentorship relationship.

Focus groups with internationally educated medical laboratory technologists (IEMLTs) followed by an online survey clearly indicated a strong case for a peer support network/mentorship program. Almost six in ten IEMLTs do not have anyone supporting them as they navigate their way from the application process to the workplace. Many find it difficult to connect with other medical laboratory technologists (MLTs) yet feel that knowing other MLTs would be valuable to them. Most (85%) indicated an interest in being a part of a peer support network. IEMLTs indicated a slight preference (44% versus 38%) for one-on-one support versus group support and slightly more (68%) would prefer to meet in-person rather than by video/Skype (51%) or via electronic bulletin board (53%). More IEMLTs prefer that the supporter/mentor is

internationally educated (31%) versus Canadian educated (11%), but most would be happy with either (58%). The notion of paying a fee to be a part of the network was explored with IEMLTs and it is believed that a fee of \$75 may be charged. Overall, IEMLTs indicated a strong need and desire for a peer support network. Content areas of interest include finding a job, securing employment prior to licensure, certification exam, and the application and assessment process. Access to experienced MLTs is very important to most IEMLTs. There is also strong interest in an electronic bulletin board, hearing guest speakers and having periodic face-to-face meetings.

Based on the above findings, recommendations on a proposed model for a sustainable peer support network for internationally educated medical laboratory technologists are proffered including key policy issues and an implementation framework. Elements of the model include a secure website with opportunities for both online and in-person support as well as online discussion boards and information on the topics of most interest to IEMLTs including how to find a job, prepare for the certification exam, navigate the assessment process and secure employment prior to licensure. It is recommended that the site be administered by CSMLS and that opportunities for partnership and government funding be explored. Funding models for long-term sustainability are discussed to ensure that the network is sustainable.

Introduction

The Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science (CSMLS) is the national certifying body and professional association for medical laboratory technologists and medical laboratory assistants. While licensure is a provincial regulatory body function, CSMLS is responsible for establishing and implementing entry to practice assessments of medical laboratory technologists through a prior learning assessment and certification exam. In recent years the CSMLS has undertaken numerous projects to develop a comprehensive, fair and consistent application, assessment, remediation and licensing process for internationally-educated medical laboratory technologists (IEMLTs). The pathway to licensure includes an online self-assessment, academic credential assessment, language proficiency and prior learning assessments, personalized remediation plan and certification exam. As a result, the CSMLS is one of only two Canadian health professions that offer a single-site application process for internationally-educated professionals, and facilitates the highest uptake among Canada's health professions of newcomers to the country.¹

The CSMLS recently undertook primary research to determine the current barriers to workplace integration for internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs), including focus groups and surveys of internationally educated medical laboratory technologists and their Canadian counterparts. Results from this recent project suggest that there may be a need for a peer support network to expedite the certification of IEMLTs and ease their integration into the workforce.

The purpose of this project is to determine what, if any, other peer support networks are in existence including those offered by other regulated professions and by government agencies and immigration centres; to determine the peer support needs of IEMLTs as they move from the application process through to credential assessment, gap remediation, licensing and ultimately integration into the workforce; and based on the first two objectives, to recommend possible strategies for a sustainable peer support network, including recommendations on roles for government agencies, immigration centres and professional organizations.

As such, a literature review and environmental scan was conducted, followed by focus groups and an online survey of internationally educated medical laboratory technologists.

While the subject of this project is peer support networks, mentorship programs were also reviewed as mentorship is one type of peer support and is used by many professions for the purpose of integration into the workforce. For the purposes of this project the following definitions were used for the terms “peer support network” and “mentorship program”:

- Peer Support Network: A community of individuals from the same or similar profession with the purpose of providing support to each other either on a one-to-one basis, in a small group, or in a community forum.

¹ Allen, M. K., Ceolin, R., Ouellette, S., Plante, J., & Vaillancourt, C. (2007). Educating health workers: A statistical portrait. 81-595-MIE2007049. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

- **Mentorship Program:** A structured program designed to pair an experienced professional with a less experienced professional for the purpose of providing guidance, expertise and advice.

Although these definitions provide a differentiation between the two types of support relationships, in practice, the line between peer support and mentorship is often blurry. Peer support relationships sometimes involve a “peer supporter” who is trained to coach/advise their peers, which is similar to a mentor/mentee relationship.

This report contains the following components: outline of the methodology used, literature review and environmental scan, findings from the focus groups and survey, and finally, recommendations for CSMLS to consider regarding the potential establishment of a peer support network for internationally educated medical laboratory technologists.

The research and report were completed by Brian Baumal, Keith Johnson and Heather McMartin, consultants of Thinklounge Market Research who were contracted by CSMLS with funding from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada’s Foreign Credential Recognition Program.

Methodology

Literature Review and Environmental Scan

An environmental scan was conducted on the use of peer support networks and mentorship programs for the purpose of integration into the workforce. The review included theoretical works on the effect of peer support on integration as well as the practical use of peer support and mentorship by other professions. Research was conducted on existing peer support networks and mentorship programs available through government agencies, immigration centres and professional organizations. Focus was placed on peer networks and mentorship programs that support internationally educated professionals. Members of the Canadian Network of National Associations of Regulators (CNNAR) and Health Action Lobby (HEAL) were asked by CSMLS to provide examples of peer support networks. The scan initially included Canada and health care professions, but was expanded to include non-healthcare professions and other jurisdictions (Australia, UK and U.S.) to ensure that a sufficient number and variety of models were identified for analysis and consideration. Interviews were conducted with select organizations actively building or using a peer support network and that had limited information available online or in research reports.

Qualitative Study

CSMLS identified members who fit the following criteria for the study: individuals who were educated outside of Canada and were either in the process of obtaining their medical laboratory technology (MLT) license, or had obtained their MLT license within the past two years. These members were sent an initial and reminder email informing them of the focus groups. Those

who expressed interest clicked a link in the email which took them to the Thinklounge site, where they provided identification information and answered classification questions to help determine their suitability for the focus groups.

In total, eight focus groups were conducted; two in each of Mississauga, Vancouver, Calgary and online. The purpose of the online groups was to include participants from smaller communities, and communities not included in the in-person groups. The focus groups included a mix of genders, stages of progression and countries of education. There was a minimum of five and maximum of six participants in each focus group. Participants were provided with \$50 for travel and associated costs. The focus groups were conducted in late July, 2011. Please see Appendix A and B for the Recruitment Screener and the Focus Group Guide respectively.

Quantitative Study

A quantitative study was designed to verify and expand on the findings in the focus groups (see Appendix C for the questionnaire). In mid-September 2011, the same individuals invited to participate in the focus groups, were invited to participate in an online study. The study took 15 minutes to complete, and verified a person was educated outside of Canada, and that respondents lived in Canada, as the peer support network, at this point, will not be set-up to operate outside of Canada.

The table below indicates the response rate.

	Number of individuals	Percentage of total distributed
Total invitations distributed	1,210	100%
Co-operation rate, defined as total click-throughs to study	552	46%
Survey terminated – Educated in Canada	55	4%
Survey terminated – Live outside of Canada	64	5%
Incomplete study	130	11%
Completed surveys and completion rate	303	25%

Note that the margin of error associated with a sample of 303 from a total universe of 1,210 individuals is $\pm 4.9\%$ at the 95% confidence interval (i.e. 19 times out of 20).

Quantitative Study Respondent Profiles

The following are the key characteristics of those who responded to the quantitative study.

Stage Of Certification

- 74% are in various stages of the prior learning assessment process to establish eligibility to sit the CSMLS exam while 26% have passed the CSMLS exam.

- Of the 74% who are in-process:
 - 20% are gathering documents for credential review
 - 15% are having their credentials reviewed at present
 - 36% are studying for the exam
 - 28% are writing the exam, or re-writing it

- Of the 26% who have passed the exam:
 - 51% have not started working yet
 - 17% have been working for under 1 year
 - 14% have been working for 1-2 years
 - 8% have been working for 2-3 years
 - 9% have been working for 3 or more years

Provincial Distribution

Province	Proportion Of Sample (%)
British Columbia	15
Alberta	17
Saskatchewan	3
Manitoba	9
Ontario	54
Quebec	1
New Brunswick	1
Nova Scotia	1
Prince Edward Island	0
Newfoundland	0
Northwest Territories	0
Yukon Territory	0
Nunavut	0

City Size Breakout

Almost three-quarters (71%) of IEMLTs who responded to the survey live in a city with a population of 250,000 people or greater. In total:

- 57% live in a city in Canada with a population greater than 500,000
- 14% live in an urban area with a population between 250,000 – 499,999
- 16% live in a large city with a population between 125,000 – 249,999
- 11% live in a small city with a population between 25,000 – 124,999

- 2% live in a rural area with a population under 25,000

In the analysis of the data, respondents were classified into those who live in cities larger than 500,000 and those who live in cities smaller than 500,000. Given this categorization, there was very little difference noticed in their responses to many of the questions in this study.

Countries of Study

The largest proportion of survey participants were educated in the following countries:

- Philippines 34%
- India 21%
- Nigeria 10%
- Iran 7%
- United States 4%

English as First Language

In total 32% of the sample population speak English as their first language, compared to 68% for whom English is not their first language.

Literature Review

Since the year 2000, a number of Canadian health professions have produced reports outlining the major barriers to the successful transition of internationally educated individuals into their given fields.^{2,3,4,5} Findings from these reports are fairly consistent across professions, documenting communication issues, lack of Canadian experience, professional regulatory requirements, and employer discrimination as major barriers. Almost without exception, they indicate that improved access to language courses, bridging programs, mentorship and peer support opportunities, credential assessment, and national exam preparatory resources would help immigrants become licensed/registered and employed in their chosen profession.

A scan of literature on peer support networks revealed limited academic research and research reports produced by professional organizations on the structure, benefits and use of peer support networks for the purpose of supporting professionals through the licensure process and integration into the workforce. However, a few relevant articles were located and are discussed

² Keith Johnson, *Integrating internationally educated physiotherapists* (Ottawa: Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators & Canadian Physiotherapy Association, 2007).

³ C. von Zweck, *Enabling the workforce integration of international graduates: Issues and recommendations for occupational therapy in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 2006).

⁴ B. Haley & S. Simosko, *Prior learning assessment and internationally trained medical laboratory technologists* (Ottawa: Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment, 2006).

⁵ J. Blythe, A. Baumann, A. Rheaume & K. McIntosh, "Internationally educated nurses in Ontario: Maximizing the brain gain," *Health Human Resources Series Number 3* (Toronto & Hamilton: Nursing Health Services Research Unit, 2006).

below. The application of peer support networks and mentorships is discussed at length in the environmental scan section of this report.

In a 1992 study, Linda Hill found that newly minted managers judged their relationships with peers (not superiors) to be the most important developmental experiences⁶. Zubin Austin (2002) suggests that peer groups play an important and possibly dominant role in professional development because learning is intrinsically social and socially constructed filters (such as peer support networks) can help professionals to deal with an overload of information⁷. Peer groups “define what is to be believed, what can be safely ignored, what is real, and what is fake, and ultimately what is learnworthy”⁸. Austin finds that peer support is more collegial than mentorship and is very helpful to internationally educated professionals during the stressful time of trying to get licensed and find employment in a new country⁹.

A 2006 Harvard Business School Press article entitled, “Beyond Traditional Mentoring: Peers and Networks” notes that one benefit of peer support is the greater availability of peer supporters than senior mentors. The article goes on to list three conditions that are required for peer support to be successful¹⁰:

1. Peers agree that each has something to learn from the other,
2. Confidentiality can be maintained, and
3. Each is willing to reciprocate.

Many bridging programs for internationally educated professionals include peer support networks as one component of the program. Indeed, some research indicates that peer support is a key component to a successful bridging program for internationally educated professionals¹¹. Often in bridging programs there is a cohort that completes the program together, so peer groups naturally form. Many bridging programs go a step further to establish networking groups, alumni associations or international student groups to help facilitate peer-to-peer interaction.

The International Pharmacy Graduate Program (IPG), a bridging program at the University of Toronto for internationally educated pharmacists is one example of such a program. Peer networking and mentorship are integral to the IPG program¹². The IPG program is considered by the Government of Ontario to be a model bridging program for internationally educated professionals due to the incorporation of five elements: prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR), individualized learning plans, mentorship, distance learning and peer support network

⁶ Harvard Business School Press, “Beyond Traditional Mentoring: Peers and Networks”, excerpted from *Coaching and Mentoring: How to Develop Top Talent and Achieve Stronger Performance (Harvard Business Essentials)* (Boston, Mass., 2006), p 3.

⁷ Zubin Austin, “What is learnworthy? Lessons from group socialization theory for professional education and continuing professional development,” *Pharmacy Education*, 2 (2002):161-166.

⁸ Austin (2002), p 163.

⁹ Zubin Austin, “Bridging To Success: A Learning Day about Bridging Programs in Regulated Professions,” Ontario Regulators for Access Consortium (2008), http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/english/publications/br_to_success.shtml.

¹⁰ Harvard Business School Press (2006), p9.

¹¹ Austin (2008).

¹² Austin, Z., & Rocchi, M., “Bridging education in pharmacy: The International Pharmacy Graduate Program in Ontario, Canada,” *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 68(5) (2004): 1-11.

formation¹³. Peer network was added as a fifth pillar of the program when the importance of peer networking was identified by program participants¹⁴. Participants found being in a “community of learners” assisted with overcoming culture shock and isolation and led to improved learning outcomes and performance. Peer networks are often cited by bridging program participants as a “high point” of the program¹⁵. IPG’s peer support component consists of group participation in classroom and laboratory activities during the bridging program and the formation of an alumni group post-graduation. The IPG mentorship program is discussed below in the environmental scan.

Typically, mentorship for the purpose of professional development entails pairing an experienced professional with a new professional to enable the sharing of knowledge and experience¹⁶. In 2000 St. Michael’s Hospital in Toronto, Ontario identified the need to develop a mentorship program specifically for internationally educated professionals. A pilot project was completed and it was determined that the mentorship program was a successful model for integrating internationally educated professionals into the workplace. The benefits to the mentee (internationally educated professional) were identified as follows¹⁷:

- Provides the mentee with exposure to the Canadian workplace and to learn about Canadian business practices from a manager working within the same profession in Canada;
- Enhances the mentee’s access to coaching within the workplace, which can assist in the job search process (job interviews, resume writing, etc.);
- Provides mentees with the advice, moral support and encouragement that they need to persevere until they are successful in finding employment within their profession; and
- Facilitates the mentee’s access to in-house organizational events that can promote skills development and enhances an understanding of internal processes and perspectives.

It was also found that the mentorship program benefitted the mentors (experienced managers in the same field as the mentees) as well as the organization in which they worked. The mentorship model developed by St. Michael’s Hospital is discussed further in the environmental scan section of the report.

Roland and Beckford find that peer support/mentoring relationships can take the following forms¹⁸:

¹³ Austin & Rocchi (2004), p 9.

¹⁴ Austin & Rocchi (2004), p 9.

¹⁵ Austin (2008).

¹⁶ York Region Neighbourhood Services/Mentorprises, *Mentoring: 5 steps to Career Success* (Toronto, ON: York Region Neighbourhood Services, 1998).

¹⁷ St. Michael’s Hospital, *Making Connections: A New Model of Mentoring for Internationally Trained Professionals* (2003), p. 7-8.

¹⁸ Karen Roland and Clinton Beckford, “Supporting Associate Teaching and Mentoring of Teacher Candidates: Building a Community of Practice,” *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal*, Volume 1, Issue 2, (June 2010), http://www.infonomics-society.org/LICEJ/Supporting%20Associate%20Teaching%20and%20Mentoring%20of%20Teacher%20Candidates_Building%20a%20Community%20of%20Practice.pdf, p 5.

- one-to-one mentoring;
- a mentor community (peer support groups);
- ‘cybermentoring,’ or online mentoring/networks.

As such, the environmental scan is organized into three categories: In-person mentorship; online mentorship; and peer support networks.

Environmental Scan

After an exhaustive online search and with input received from members of CNNAR (which has 34 members) and HEAL (which has 35 members), an environmental scan was conducted of the following 21 organizations. Each organization was either identified by a member of CNNAR or HEAL as a potential host of a peer support network or mentorship program, or was identified by the researcher as having a peer support network or mentorship program:

Immigrant Resource Centres:

- Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)
- Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council (ERIEC)

Regulators/Associations:

- Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists
- College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta
- The Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta

Professional Organizations:

- CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses
- Career Edge
- Chinese Professionals of Canada
- Doctors Without Borders
- International Doctors Network
- Proactive Canadian Professionals
- BC Internationally Trained Professionals Network

Universities/Hospitals:

- International Pharmacy Graduate program at the University of Toronto
- York University
- St. Michael's Hospital

Government Agencies:

- Canada Health Infoway
- HealthForceOntario
- Canada InfoNet

International Organizations:

- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
- Nottinghamshire Local Education Authority (UK)
- Classroom 2.0 (U.S.A.)

In the interest of brevity and relevance, only those organizations with information of value to this project are described below.

Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)

TRIEC is a not-for-profit organization comprised of multiple stakeholders whose goal is to improve the integration of skilled immigrants in the Toronto area. In 2009, TRIEC conducted an environmental scan of professional immigrant networks. TRIEC defines professional immigrant networks as volunteer-run groups created by and for internationally educated professionals whose purpose is to provide a forum in their respective communities and create networking, employment and professional development opportunities¹⁹. The key findings of the scan were as follows²⁰:

- 70+ networks operating in the Greater Toronto Area
- 30,000+ immigrants connected to these networks
- Over 90% have formal structures with a board or an executive committee
- 42% are incorporated, non-profit organizations
- 100% deliver organized activities for their members
- Over 75% of the groups are ethno-specific
- Over 75% of the groups are sector-specific
- Immigrant networks in the legal and IT sectors are the most recent start-ups
- 16,000+ immigrants connected to engineering networks

The importance of this data for this project is the recognition of the number of existing networks in place for skilled immigrants. While most of these networks are ethno-specific and many are very small, it is possible that IEMLTs are familiar with the structure of peer support networks and therefore may be open to a peer support network hosted by CSMLS.

As a result of the above mentioned environmental scan, TRIEC established the Professional Immigrant Network, an umbrella network for many of the volunteer-run internationally educated professional networks identified in the scan²¹. The network includes links to the associated networks and can be organized by sector and by culture.

It should also be noted that TRIEC has a Mentoring Partnership program which pairs an internationally educated professional with a Canadian business professional. The goal of the program is job readiness and job searching guidance for the mentee. The program has employer partners and is funded by employers and the Maytree Foundation. The Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council (ERIEC) runs the same mentoring program model in Edmonton.

¹⁹ TRIEC, <http://www.triec.ca/programs/ImmigrantNetworks#What-is-PINs> (accessed April 2011).

²⁰ TRIEC, "Immigrant Network Facts and Stats," <http://www.triec.ca/programs/ImmigrantNetworks/FactsandStats> (accessed April 2011).

²¹ TRIEC, "TRIEC Professional Immigrant Network," <http://www.triec.ca/programs/ImmigrantNetworks> (accessed April 2011).

Mentorship Programs

In-person Mentorship Programs

St. Michael's Hospital's mentorship model for internationally-educated professionals

In 2000 St. Michael's Hospital spearheaded a project to build a mentorship model for internationally-educated professionals²². The project was funded by The Maytree Foundation initially, and further funds were received from Human Resources Development Canada and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities in 2002. The purpose of the project was to develop a mentorship model for internationally educated professionals (IEPs) that would be transferrable across occupations and locations. The result of the project is a "How to Manual" of best practices, strategies, approaches and resources for organizations to use to implement their own mentorship program for IEPs.

How does the mentorship program work?

The structure of the mentorship model is as follows: "Job ready" IEPs are referred to the sponsoring organization (i.e. a hospital or other employer with identified potential mentors) by settlement/immigrant/community agencies. The sponsoring organization matches IEPs with mentors who have compatible education, work experience and career goals and a minimum of two years' work experience in Canada.

The "How to Manual" suggests that organizations start with a small group (5-10) of committed mentors to ensure kinks are worked out before opening the program to the whole organization. They found that word-of-mouth was the best means of recruiting mentors. A Program Coordinator, hired/appointed by the sponsoring organization is responsible for facilitating the recruitment of mentors. In the pilot project they started with seven mentors – senior managers from different departments across the hospital. In the subsequent cycle of mentorships there were 22 mentors, up from 7 through word-of-mouth. Over two years the number of mentors grew to 54.

Community agencies receive mentor profiles from the employer and identify potential mentees based on available mentors. Mentee profiles are then sent to the Program Coordinator to determine possible matches. Mentees and mentors are interviewed, results of the interviews are reviewed, and the match is identified to the Advisory Committee, a group composed of leadership from the employer organization and the community agencies.

Before meeting, mentees and mentors receive training on their roles. After training the Program Coordinator introduces the mentor and mentee and they negotiate goals for the mentorship relationship. It is recommended that the pair meet for six hours per month over a 6-month

²² St. Michael's Hospital, *Making Connections: A New Model of Mentoring for Internationally Trained Professionals* (2003), <http://www.embaucheimmigrants.ca/fr/pdf/MakingConnections.pdf>.

period. The mentor and mentee decide where and when they will meet. The Program Coordinator touches base on a monthly basis to ensure the relationship is going well. At end of each mentoring cycle (it is suggested that there are 10 matches per cycle), the Program Coordinator organizes a reception to thank all participants, recognize achievements and to encourage networking. There is also ongoing evaluation of the mentoring program.

Resources required for implementing the mentorship model:

- Program Coordinator: coordinates screening, selection, matching and training of mentees and mentors. Estimated time required: .5 FTE for initial set-up (2-3 months; then 59 hours per cycle of 10 matches). Recommend 3 cycles per year which would total 177 hrs or 0.11 FTE.
- Advisory Committee (members of sponsoring organization and community agencies (referral agencies)): responsible for input and guidance on adaptation, implementation and evaluation of mentoring program.
- Employment counsellors in community agencies: recruit/refer IEPs to the sponsoring organization.
- Mentors: Senior managers/experienced staff at the sponsoring organization who volunteer to be mentors. Must have a minimum of two years' work experience in Canada.
- Mentees: "Job ready" IEPs who are recruited and referred by settlement/community agencies. Recommend minimum Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) of level 5.

The involvement of community agencies' was key to this model being successful for St. Michael's College because the agencies provide the mentee referrals. They also found that it was important to have the participating community agencies and sponsoring organization (employer) together on the advisory committee to ensure both parties needs are being met and communication lines are open. The Program Coordinator also helps to facilitate communication between the two parties by working with both on the overall coordination of the program.

The chart below (from the "How to Manual") indicates anticipated expenses and required resources for the mentorship program model²³:

²³ St. Michael's Hospital, p 19.

ANTICIPATED TASKS & RELATED EXPENSES	RESOURCE OPTIONS
<p>PROGRAM START-UP & FACILITATION OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct preliminary meetings with program stakeholders to build support towards program implementation • Coordinate and facilitate meetings and model development • Develop forms and processes • Requires 0.5 FTE for the first two or three months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing staff organized the initial program concept and start-up • Pilot project and model development required the resources of full-time staff. This would not be required for an ongoing program.
<p>RECRUITMENT, SCREENING, MATCHING AND ORIENTING PARTICIPANTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing implementation of the mentoring model • Requires 59 hours for each cycle of matches (x three times a year = 177 hours per year) or 0.11 FTE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full-time or part-time (depending on program scope and goals) • One person or responsibilities shared between different people • Internal secondment and/or external contract • Costs covered by organization or shared with partner community agencies or covered by an external funder (e.g. private/public foundation)
<p>SPACE, EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is assumed that organizations embarking on this program will use existing space, equipment and supplies. • The additional cost would be less than \$5,000 per year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributions from the sponsoring organization and community partners will include meeting space, training space, photocopies to reproduce manuals and other materials, meeting refreshments and small celebratory events and acknowledgements.

Objectives of the mentorship model:

- To provide IEPs with access to career opportunities.
- To provide experienced staff with the professional development opportunity of being a mentor.
- To provide employers with access to, and a better understanding of a diverse labour market to help address skills shortages and respond to an increasingly diverse client base.

Results from the pilot indicated that for 70% of mentees the mentorship can lead to full-time employment, further education and a more defined career path²⁴. Shorter term results indicate the following benefits to the mentorship program²⁵:

- Networks and connections are established with like professionals in the Canadian workplace and with other internationally trained professionals ;
- Job search strategies for the Canadian workplace are developed;
- Further education or job training is pursued;
- Language skills, particularly professional terminology, are improved ;and
- Self-confidence is enhanced.

²⁴ St. Michael's Hospital, p 2.

²⁵ St. Michael's Hospital, p 2.

The Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta (APEGGA)

APEGGA's Mentoring Program is considered by some to be the best mentorship program for engineers in Canada. The Program pairs a less experienced engineer with an experienced engineer²⁶. It is designed for all engineers including those who are internationally educated. The Program is a hybrid of a formal and informal mentorship program. The formal components include workshops and written material. The informal aspect of the program is that the activities of the one-on-one part of the mentorship program are decided by the mentor and the mentee. Mentorships are to last 12 months. There is an evaluation at the midway and end points of the mentorship.

Online Mentorship Program

Canada InfoNet

Canada InfoNet is a website that facilitates online mentoring and provides resources and services on settlement and immigration to help internationally educated professionals (IEPs) integrate into Canadian society and secure employment²⁷. The site was created and is operated by Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) Toronto, a not-for-profit organization that helps individuals of diverse backgrounds to reach their education and employment goals. The site is currently funded by the Foreign Credentials Referral Office (FCRO).

The Online Mentoring Program is the primary resource available to IEPs on Canada InfoNet. The Program was initiated in 2002. Mentors are volunteers who have a minimum of two years' work experience in Canada and who understand the challenges of immigration – many from first-hand experience. Mentees are internationally educated professionals who are new to Canada or in the process of relocating to Canada; have worked in a specific profession or trade for a minimum of two years; and are able to communicate in English. The purpose of the Program is to enable mentors to provide guidance and support to IEPs on navigating entry into their profession. Mentors help mentees in the following ways²⁸:

- Sharing insights into Canadian work and values.
- Passing on information about current workplace and industry trends.
- Providing feedback on resumes and interview techniques.
- Assisting with self-marketing techniques and confidence building.
- Identify skills required by market demands, and help to guide mentees through licensing processes.
- Helping to improve professional terminology.
- Advising on programs to help upgrade technical skills and professional standing.

²⁶ APPEGGA Mentoring Program, <http://www.apegga.org/members/Mentoring/tocGENERAL.html> (accessed April 2011).

²⁷ Adapted from the Canada InfoNet website, www.canadainfonet.org (accessed April 19, 2011).

²⁸ Canada InfoNet, "Who are Mentors?", http://www.canadainfonet.org/about_canada_info_net/who_are_mentors/ (accessed April 19, 2011).

- Locating publications and workshops relating to developments in their field.
- Providing access to professional networks.
- Offering support and encouragement to help mentees become professionally established.

How does the Online Mentoring Program work?

Mentors and mentees register on the Canada InfoNet site and provide basic contact information as well as occupation, industry, settlement location, etc.²⁹. At the point of registration mentors and mentees sign a disclaimer to remove JVS from potential legal issues/concerns. The system recommends mentor and mentee matches based on a matching algorithm which takes criteria such as occupation, industry, and settlement location into account. A Mentoring Coach reviews the proposed match and recommends whether it will work or whether a better match is available. A version of the mentee's profile is then sent to the proposed mentor for the mentor to determine whether they can be of assistance to the individual. Only relevant information such as occupation and work experience is provided in the profile that is sent to the mentor. Personal contact information is not included (only first name, for example). If the mentor feels they can be of assistance then the mentor's profile is sent to the mentee for review. Again, personal information is not included in the mentor profile that is sent to the mentee in order to maintain confidentiality. It is left up to the mentor and mentee whether they wish to share contact information.

Once both parties agree to be mentor and mentee they sign a contract to govern the mentoring relationship. The contract outlines the expectations of the mentee and the mentor such as how often they will meet, etc. Mentoring begins once the contract is signed. The mentor and mentee are also provided with an information kit including suggestions of what to do, areas to cover, and how to build the relationship. There is no in-person training of mentors at present but Canada InfoNet is considering providing online mentor training in future.

The mentorship occurs via a private discussion board accessible only by the mentor, mentee and the mentorship coach employed by Canada InfoNet. Each mentorship takes place over a 3-4 month period totalling approximately 24 hours over 4 months.

The role of the coach is to ensure that the mentoring discussion is maintained at a professional level and that contact occurs as often as was agreed to by both parties. The coach also provides support to the mentor and mentee as required. If, for example, the mentor is unable to answer a question posed by the mentee the coach may respond or conduct research to provide a response. The coach also monitors the relationship to determine if the mentor or mentee are experiencing any problems.

²⁹ Interview with Debroy Chan, Online Mentoring Program Manager, Canada InfoNet, on April 19, 2011.

Individuals from all professions are eligible to use the Program. At present the majority of occupations that are represented are those in information technology, engineering, finance, and architecture. There are few mentees or mentors from healthcare.

Recruitment of mentors and mentees

The Online Mentoring Program is currently meeting its target of 120 matches per year. Mentors are sourced through volunteer websites and by JVS's volunteer department. The Online Mentoring Program Manager also distributes business cards and recruits mentors when possible. Some mentors come forward by finding the Canada InfoNet website. Many of the mentors are Canadian-born who are experts in their field and wish to volunteer their time to help new Canadians.

Over the last few months, Canada InfoNet has been focusing recruitment efforts of mentees on pre-arrival, or mentees considering or in the process of relocating to Canada. At this point, given this recent focus on pre-arrival, 90% of mentees are pre-arrival, whereas in the past, the majority of mentees were post-arrival. Rationale was not given by the Manager for this new focus but it was acknowledged that pre-arrival is a focus for the FCRO at present.

Financial sustainability and human resource requirements

Funding by the FCRO for the Online Mentoring Program is in place until September 2011. As a result, Canada InfoNet is reviewing their structure and funding model. There are currently two full-time staff employed to facilitate and administer the Online Mentoring Program – a Manager and a Coach. While in the past there have been less staff (from .5 to 1), according to the Manager, for the Program to be as effective as possible a minimum of two staff is required to maintain recruitment efforts and provide adequate coaching support.

Given that government funding is set to expire in September 2011 Canada InfoNet is looking at possible areas of growth and opportunities to partner with other organizations. Canada InfoNet would welcome a discussion with CSMLS and have a presentation that could be delivered, should CSMLS wish to learn more about the existing infrastructure that is in place to run the Canada InfoNet Online Mentoring Program.

Online & In-person Mentorship Program

The International Pharmacy Graduate Program's Mentorship Network at the University of Toronto

The IPG's "Mentorship Network" links individual internationally educated pharmacists with a practicing pharmacist. The goal of the program is to assist internationally educated pharmacists with professional enculturation; to develop connections to sustain through the licensing process;

and to help with securing employment post-graduation from the bridging program³⁰. Mentors benefit from helping new pharmacists and having access to a pool of potential hires. The IPG program has a mentor training program to help mentors with communication and cultural awareness³¹.

The IPG program offers online bridging courses so participants are from across the province. As a result, the mentor and mentee may either meet in person or through the use of “distance technologies” for those in remote parts of the province.

Peer Support Networks

CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses

While CARE provides numerous services and resources to internationally educated nurses, there is only one program that resembles a peer support network, and it is in the early stages of development. The CARE Alumni Networking Group has been established for alumni of the CARE Centre to support each other and to keep the positive momentum going from leaving the CARE Centre to securing employment. An interview was conducted with John Mavrogiannakis, an employee at CARE responsible for the CARE Alumni Networking Group. Mr. Mavrogiannakis indicated that there has been limited success to date in building this networking group. The impetus to building the group was knowledge that alumni were forming unofficial networking groups, so there was identified interest in building a network. A survey was conducted with alumni from the last ten years to validate that interest and to determine what activities would be beneficial to members. CARE has since been attempting to update records to reconnect with alumni and inform them of the networking group.

Currently the Networking Group activities consist of in-person networking events³². The CARE Centre is in the midst of planning the overall format of the network and are considering online and video conferencing; an online discussion board; tutoring; and additional events and activities. CARE has tried other peer support models in the past such as a peer-to-peer exam study, but it was not a success. They found that just because someone has gone through the exam process, doesn't mean they can necessarily help someone else. Ultimately, the CARE Centre is hoping to provide an online forum for peer networking, but that the network itself will take on a life of its own, and that for it to be successful, the network will need to be maintained and built by the users. As for privacy and legal issues, CARE is hoping to employ a new software system on which the network will be built and will have security measures in place so

³⁰ Austin & Rocchi (2004), p 6.

³¹ Austin & Rocchi (2004), p 7.

³² CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses, Alumni Networking Group, <http://www.care4nurses.org/what-we-do/alumni/> (accessed April 2011).

that visitors to the site can only see what CARE wants them to see (i.e. personal information will not be visible).

Doctors Without Borders Peer Support Network

The purpose of the Doctors Without Borders Peer Support Network is to prepare outgoing field volunteers for their experience overseas and also to ease the transition back to their home country after a field experience³³. The Peer Network is run by volunteers who have completed a field placement. Although the purpose of the network is different than what CSMLS peer support users will require, the structure and the process of sharing contact information is an interesting one. The Peer Support Network is officially separate from the Doctors Without Borders (Medicines sans Frontiers (MSF) Canada) organization in order to provide anonymity for the network users. However, MSF Canada provides the contact information for new volunteers to the Peer Support Network to make contact prior to the volunteer undertaking a field placement. After returning from the field, MSF Canada debriefs the volunteer, and if they are interested, provides their contact information to the Peer Support Network for post-field experience support. This way, MSF Canada is removed from the network and volunteers feel more open to disclose information on their experience and their emotional and mental state.

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) conducted a pilot of a peer support program for international medical graduates (IMGs) in 2004³⁴. The Peer Support Program for IMGs consisted of a facilitated discussion between a small group of Australian international medical graduates. The group met every two weeks over a 3-month time period. The number of attendees varied from 4 to 11. Areas of discussion were determined by the group and included exam preparation, immigration concerns, financial concerns, and personal resources (local services, employment for spouse, etc.). The discussion was facilitated by an academic and recorded for the purpose of research. The conclusion of the researchers was that there is a need for the establishment of a permanent forum like this one for international medical graduates.

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners also has a Professional Peer Support Group in place for all licensed general practitioners (GPs)³⁵. Small groups of 7-8 medical practitioners (less in rural areas) meet twice a month for 60-90 minutes to discuss areas of interest. Meetings are led by a trained group facilitator who self identifies/refers and is also a medical practitioner. The decision to have a leader/facilitator for the peer support groups was based on research that found groups with a leader are more cohesive, better organized and have

³³ Medicins sans Frontiers Canada, Peer Support Network, <http://www.msf.ca/recruitment/peer-support/> (accessed April 2011).

³⁴ Clare Heale & Harry Jacobs, "A peer support program for international medical graduates", *Australian Family Physician* Vol. 34, No. 4, (April 2005), <http://www.racgp.org.au/afp/200504/200504heal.pdf>.

³⁵ Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP), "Professional Peer Support Group Framework", The beyondblue / Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) Medical Workforce Initiative, <http://www.racgp.org.au/Content/NavigationMenu/PracticeSupport/peersupport/Peersupportnetwork/ProfessionalPeerSupportGroups.pdf>.

more direction. Attendees get “points” for attending a peer support group because of potential learnings. Group discussions are confidential to promote full disclosure although groups must observe the professional code of conduct as determined by the RACGP.

Nottinghamshire Local Education Authority (UK)

The Heads Count Peer Support Program is a one-to-one peer support program for school principals³⁶ (referred to as “heads” in the UK). Those interested in being “peer supporters” identify themselves to the Nottinghamshire Local Education Authority which administers the program (but does not monitor the peer relationship to allow for confidentiality). “Peer supporters” receive four days of training before their name and contact information is posted on the Nottinghamshire County Council website where peer supportees can access the list of supporters and make contact³⁷. Peer supporters and supportees determine where, when and how often they will meet, and they may stop meeting when they choose. One year and a half after initiating the program 25% of the target group (principals) were taking part in the peer support program.

The Nottinghamshire Local Education Authority chose “peer support” instead of coaching or mentoring because peer support infers a benefit to both parties and is not necessarily a senior teacher supporting a junior teacher.

The Heads Count Peer Support Program is one of the only programs researched which is virtually self-sustaining. The Education Authority received funding to build the training program for the initial cadre of peer supporter heads, but from that point on, there is zero cost to the Authority as participants are not paid for their time and individual school boards cover any necessary travel costs. There are virtually no costs to administer the program since supporter names are simply left posted on the website and those wishing to contact peer supporters self-identify and self-match with the existing list of supporters. Updating the list on the website would require minimum human resource support.

Classroom 2.0

Classroom 2.0 is an example of an occupation-specific internet forum for the purpose of knowledge sharing and professional support. The purpose of the web forum is for education colleagues to discuss challenges and seek advice from peers about web 2.0 and social media in education³⁸. While it appears to be based out of the U.S., there are members from other countries as well. The site allows users to upload videos and pose discussion questions. They have also started using the site to set up regional meetings to discuss issues in small groups in-person. There are currently 55,000 members. Registration is required.

³⁶International Networking for Educational Transformation(iNet), “Nottinghamshire Local Education Authority (UK) Heads Count Peer Support Program”, <http://www.sst-inet.net/resources/olc/papers/peersupportforprincipals.aspx>.

³⁷ Nottinghamshire County Council website, <http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/home/learningandwork/educationandachievement/cpd/cpd-headscount/cpd-headscount-peers-primary.htm>.

³⁸ Classroom 2.0, <http://www.classroom20.com>.

Key Findings of the Literature Review and Environmental Scan

1. **There are three main types of peer support for professionals:**
 - **Traditional (in-person, one-on-one) mentorship** (e.g. St. Michael’s Hospital mentorship model, APEGGA mentorship program, TRIEC and ERIEC mentorship programs);
 - **Online mentorship** (e.g. Canada Infonet, IPG mentorship program (offered in-person and online));
 - **Peer support network.** Peer networks themselves have a few different formats including:
 - i. Website for registered users with resources, discussion forum, videos, etc. (Classroom 2.0);
 - ii. Off-line peer support groups (RACGP networks, Heads Count Peer Support Program);
 - iii. Off-line one-on-one peer support (Doctors Without Borders).

2. **Many existing peer support networks for internationally educated professionals are web-based, making them accessible to IEPs in non-urban locations.** Some of the tools available for web-based peer support networks include:
 - Discussion forums/question and answer forums
 - Online mentorship programs
 - Webinars
 - Video conferencing
 - Video uploading
 - Links to documents/resources

3. Based on TRIEC’s environmental scan which only included Toronto, but is perhaps a microcosm of what is available across the country, **there are numerous existing peer support networks for internationally educated professionals.** These existing networks can benefit CSMLS in the following ways:
 - CSMLS can build on existing infrastructure if desired (e.g. Canada InfoNet).
 - CSMLS can advertise its own peer support network on existing professional networks to attract IEMLTs.
 - IEMLTs may be comfortable with a peer support network given their prevalence online and in immigrant resource centres, government agencies, professional bodies, etc.

4. **In some professions peer support networks are embedded in bridging programs** since bridging programs provide a “natural” gathering of internationally educated peers.

5. **Key facets of successful peer support networks include:**
 - **Mutual benefit** for all/both parties
 - Maintenance of **confidentiality**
 - **Training of the supporter(s)/mentor(s)**
 - **Mutually agreed to terms and conditions**
6. **Peer support networks can provide support during various stages of the licensing, employment and integration process.** Some organizations' models support one part of the process, others support all.
7. Depending on the organization and the availability of participants, **mentors and/or peer supporters for internationally educated professionals are either Canadian educated professionals or internationally educated professionals who have been working in Canada for a minimum of two years.** Mentors and peer supporters typically receive training on how to provide support. Mentors/supporters are recruited through word-of-mouth, by employers, and through organizational/volunteer websites.
8. Some research indicated that the **presence or involvement of a facilitator** – whether it be someone leading a small peer support group (e.g. Royal Australian College of GPs) or someone overseeing or facilitating a successful mentorship relationship (Canada InfoNet) – lead to clearer direction and better likelihood of goal attainment and cohesion.
9. **Few peer support networks and mentorship programs are economically self-sustainable.** Most rely on government funding. Few require participants to pay a registration fee. The Heads Count Peer Support Program in Nottinghamshire is the only self-sustainable model. Government funds were secured for the development of the training program for peer supporters, but once that was developed, the program “runs itself” without registration costs or funding from the administering body. The limit to this model is that the Program relies on the website for participant recruitment and leaves the success and/or failure of the peer support relationship up to the participants.
10. **Organizations manage privacy issues associated with mentorship programs and peer support networks in different ways.** There is a wide spectrum of the protection of privacy from posting peer supporter names, email addresses and phone numbers on a public website (Nottinghamshire Local Education Authority's Heads Count Peer Support Program), to removal of all personal information from mentor and mentee profiles (Canada InfoNet). Those organizations that actively protect the privacy of participants tend to employ software that will ensure personal information is secure.

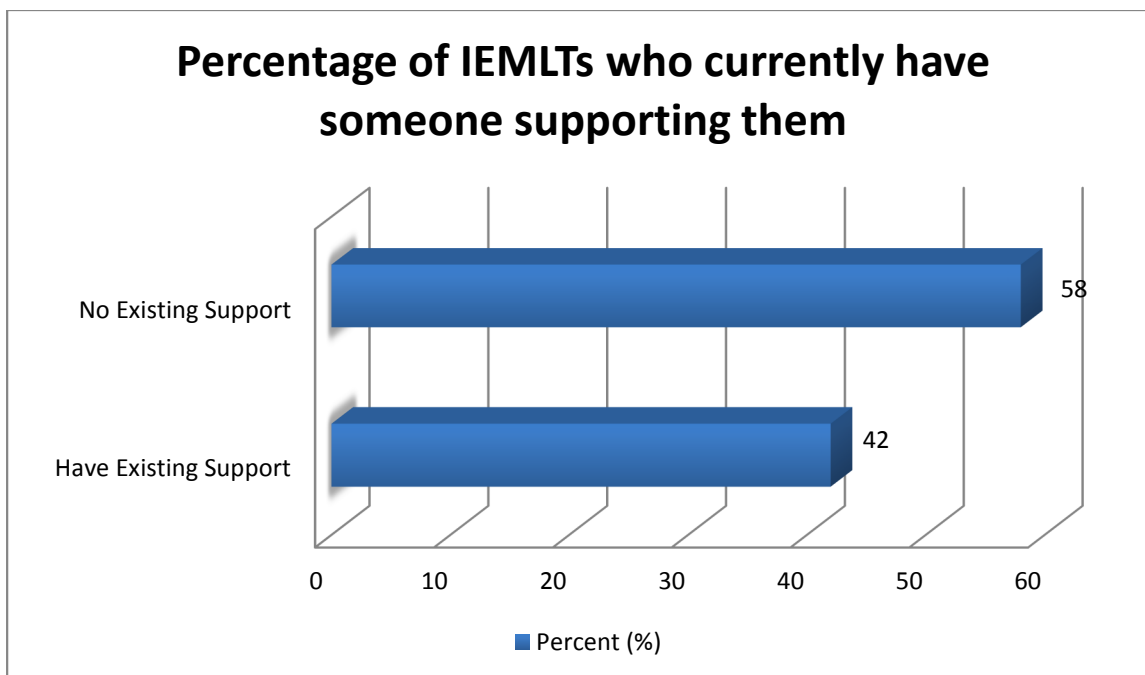
Findings from Qualitative and Quantitative Studies

The Case for a Peer Support Network

Results from the focus groups and survey indicate that internationally educated medical laboratory technologists would benefit from, and would be interested in being a part of a peer support network.

Just over half have no existing peer support

Respondents were asked if they have someone who provides them with support as they are going through the process of becoming an MLT in Canada. As the chart below shows, almost six in ten (58%) say that they do not have anyone supporting them through the process.



Of the 42% who have support:

- 28% receive support from a friend ahead of them in the MLT process
- 8% receive support from a family member unfamiliar with the MLT process
- 4% receive support from a family member ahead of them in the MLT process
- 2% receive support from a friend not involved in the MLT process

Also, of those who get support:

- 35% say the supporter provides them with moral support
- 30% say the supporter provides help in studying for the exam
- 13% say the supporter provides information on employment
- 12% say the supporter introduces them to people in similar situations

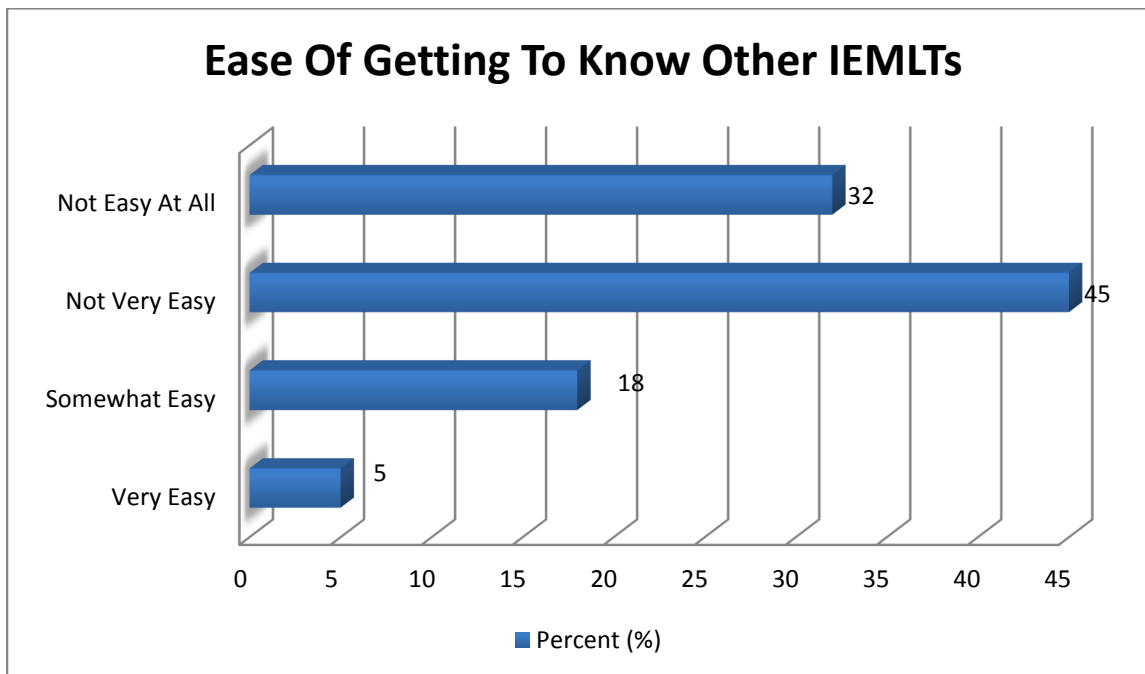
- 7% say the supporter introduces them to people who can help them find a job

This last statistic that only 7% say their supporter introduces them to those who can help them find a job is echoed in the data that follows. The research indicates that finding job opportunities is very important to IEMLTs and is one area which IEMLTs say is not sufficiently addressed in the current process.

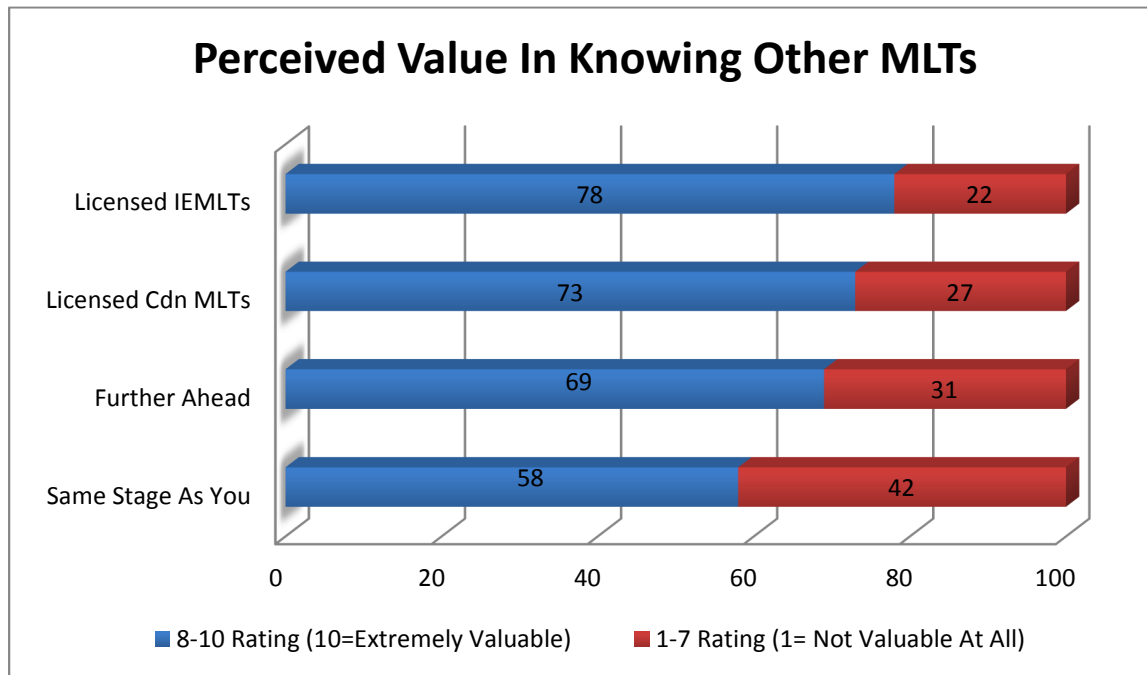
In addition, while the environmental scan revealed that there are existing peer support networks for internationally educated professionals, particularly those that are ethno-centric, as well as networks administered by settlement agencies and job placement programs, the focus groups revealed that IEMLTs are not making much use of these support networks. Indeed, job placement programs outside of the field of medical laboratory technology were highly criticized for not being able to understand the medical laboratory technology field and suggesting a strong desire for some sort of support network relating to this area of employment.

Just over three quarters (77%) say it is not easy to meet others going through the same process and similar proportions feel it is very valuable to meet others

As the chart below indicates, a significant majority of IEMLTs say that it is not easy to find and talk to other internationally educated individuals who are going through the same process of becoming an MLT.



An equally significant finding appears in the following chart. Most IEMLTs feel that it would be extremely valuable to know other MLTs, particularly those who are licensed and practicing.



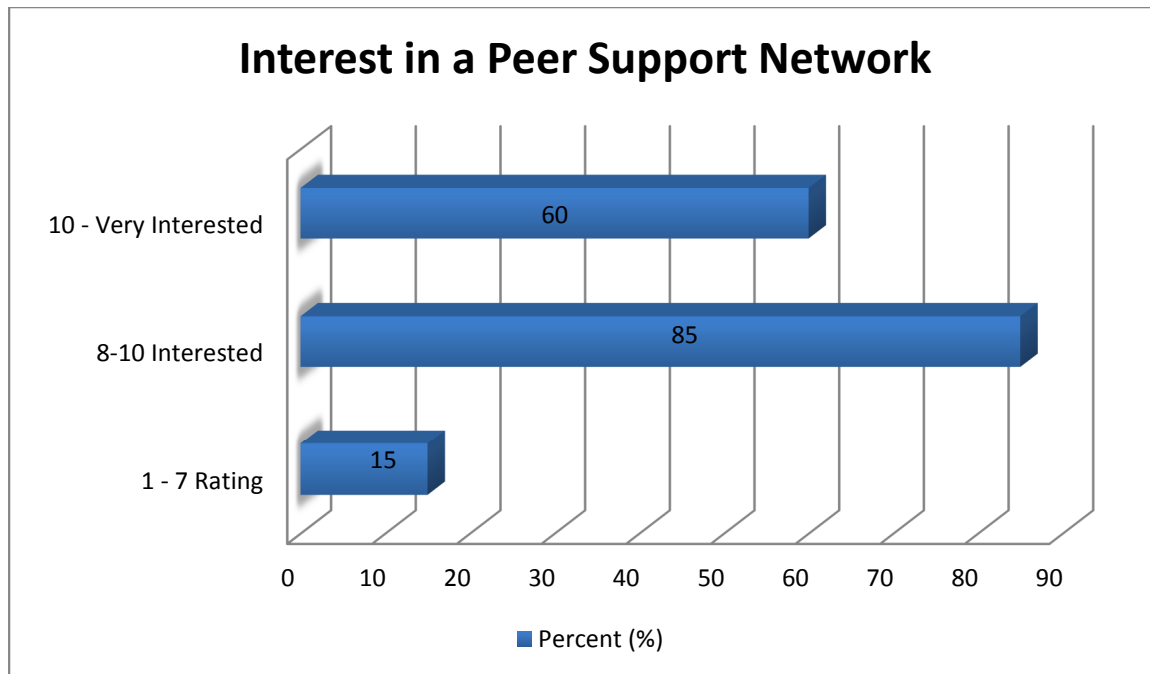
Support for the basic concept of a Peer Support Network is quite high

Respondents were asked for their interest in the general concept of a peer support network. The question in the survey outlined the general concept as follows:

A peer support network would be something that you could join with other internationally educated individuals. The peer support network may provide support and advice on issues such as credentialing, studying for the exam, networking, gaining experience and finding a job. The peer support network is intended to provide you with a broad range of ways to help you and is not specifically a way to get tutoring. The peer support network would answer questions that you have and ultimately make the process easier and quicker. How interested would you be in being a part of this kind of network?"

The participants were then asked to rate their interest on a 1-10 scale, where 10 meant “Very Interested” and 1 meant “Not Interested At All”.

In total, six in ten (60%) are very interested in this concept of a peer support network by giving a 10 out of 10 rating, with 85% being interested by giving a rating of between 8-10.

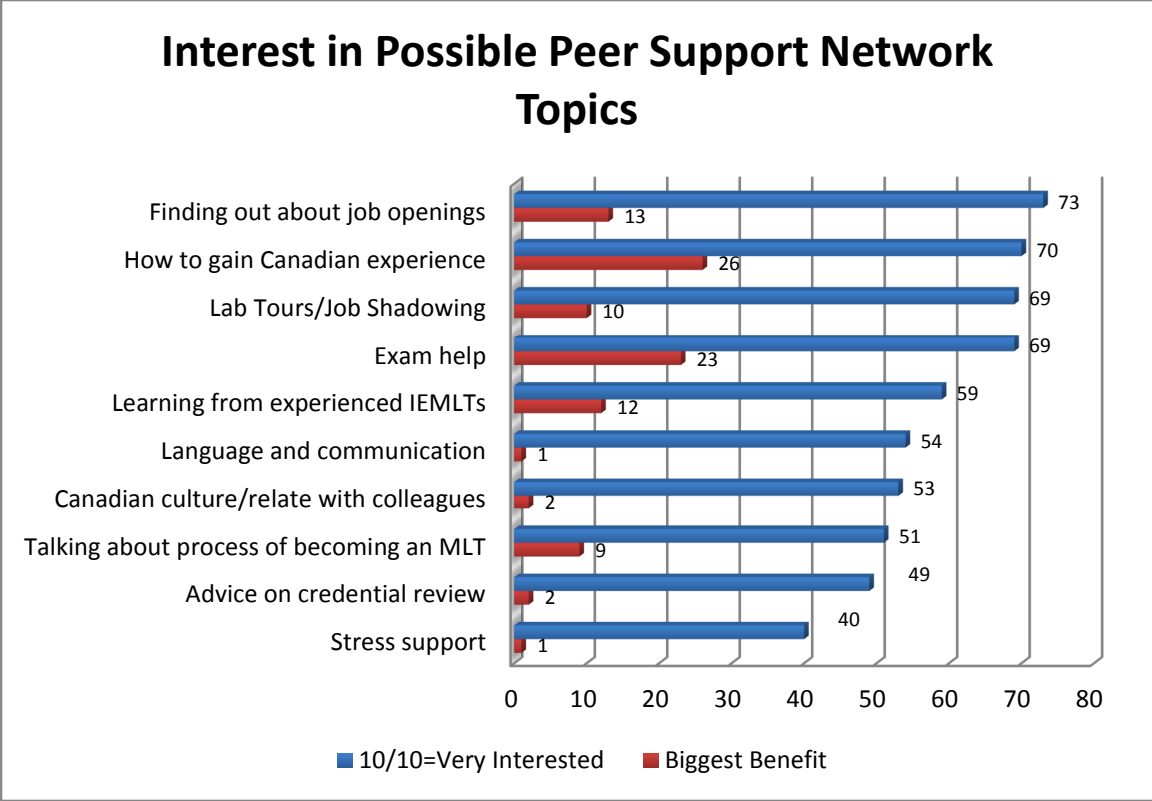


What IEMLTs would like to see in a peer support network

In the focus groups with early stage IEMLTs, four key themes emerged as areas of concentration for a peer support network:

1. Seeking and securing a job (i.e. job trends, job hunting, and interview and resume skills);
2. How to gain Canadian experience prior to licensure;
3. Exam preparation; and
4. Credentialing and the licensing process.

These themes were validated in the quantitative study, as is seen in the chart below which captures the level of interest of IEMLTs on possible topics to be included in a Peer Support Network.



The desire to gain Canadian experience prior to licensure was a recurring message from focus group participants and as indicated above was perceived as the biggest possible benefit to survey respondents. Yet there are currently limited opportunities for IEMLTs to gain Canadian experience prior to licensure because of liability issues. IEMLTs felt that anything that the peer support network could do in this regard would be exceptionally helpful and will make the peer support network successful. Should a peer support network be established, it will be important at the outset to be very clear whether, and how, Canadian experience can be gained through the network.

Another topic of strong interest is finding out about job opportunities. This can be seen in the chart above by both the high proportion of those who say they are very interested in the topic and those who rate it as the biggest possible benefit of a peer support network. Focus group participants noted an interest in finding out where the jobs are in terms of who is hiring, who is laying off, and where jobs are located geographically in Canada. Participants are also interested in learning interview skills.

There is also strong interest from IEMLTs in using a peer support network to help in preparing for the certification exam. Focus group participants felt that studying with other people for the exam is much more helpful than studying alone. Participants would also want to know what topics to study for the exam and how to get reference materials.

IEMLTs also indicated an interest in finding out more about the bridging program and additional courses that can be taken at places like Mohawk College in terms of which courses to take and how valuable they will be in getting them certified/licensed.

Focus group participants discussed how they find it very difficult to meet other IEMLTs. They are not seeking emotional support, but feel that gathering with those who are going through the same process would be helpful. The best way participants feel that they can deal with the stress of becoming an MLT in Canada is to have help in making the process easier.

While culture and language are often cited as barriers to integration for internationally educated professionals and areas in which skilled immigrants would benefit from support, this was not the case for focus group participants in this study. This is likely because the participants were primarily early-stage individuals who are not yet employed or have recently been employed so there is not a strong need to provide support on work environment issues like culture and language. The quantitative study revealed a different result however, in that just over half of survey respondents were interested in culture and communication as topics to be included in a peer support network. The reason for the difference is likely that the survey captured a slightly broader demographic such as some IEMLTs who are currently practicing, for whom these topics may be top of mind as they are typically workplace-related.

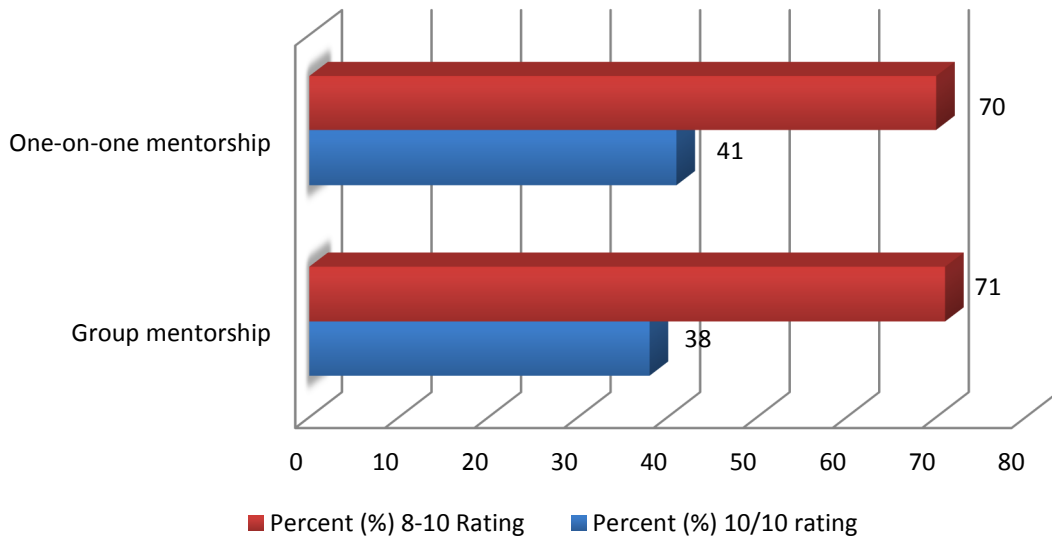
Input from IEMLTs on the implementation of a peer support network or mentorship program

The quantitative study provided insight into IEMLTs' preferences for the implementation of a support network. The findings from the survey are outlined below.

Mentoring - group versus one-on-one

Respondents were asked the kind of format they prefer for mentorship, which was defined in the study as asking questions of someone who had been through the process of becoming an MLT. Overall, there is a slight preference for a one-on-one format, with 44% saying they strongly prefer (i.e. give a rating of 10/10) one-on-one mentorship, compared to 38% who strongly prefer mentorship in a group setting. The proportions are approximately equal at about seven in ten of those giving preference ratings of 8-10 for each format.

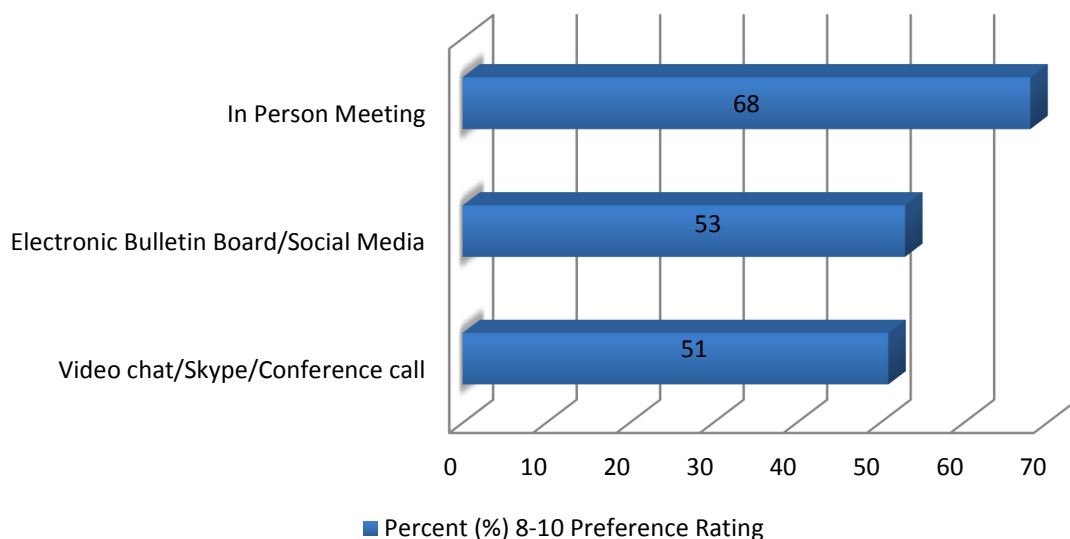
Mentorship Format Preference



Meeting Format

Participants were given a choice of how they would like to have meetings – either in-person, via video chat or on Electronic Bulletin Boards. The results show the preference is for in-person meetings, with 68% saying that they prefer this format (giving it a preference rating of between 8-10), compared to 51% for video/Skype and 53% for Electronic Bulletin Boards or Social Media.

Preference for Network Meeting Format



Note that the focus group findings influence this issue a fair bit. While it is recognized that face-to-face is preferable because of the fellowship that could be created, there are a number of other considerations:

- Face-to-face works well when the topic to be discussed is exam studying, where people can point to papers and books needed to help in challenging the exam. It would be critical for face-to-face meetings to have someone taking minutes and posting them online for others to see, and as a record of the process.
- On a Bulletin Board (online), people can post and access questions at will. That is, the board serves as a reference for various topics, and has the potential to provide answers to questions very quickly as IEMLTs may find their answer has already been posted, or by posting a question it is possible to get a quick response often before the next face-to-face meeting.
- An online network in the form of a Bulletin Board and/or Video Chat (among other online communication options) is the only way of feasibly including individuals in remote locations. A Video Chat may be considered a possible compromise to having face-to-face meetings. However, it does not produce the permanent online record that is possible with a Bulletin Board.

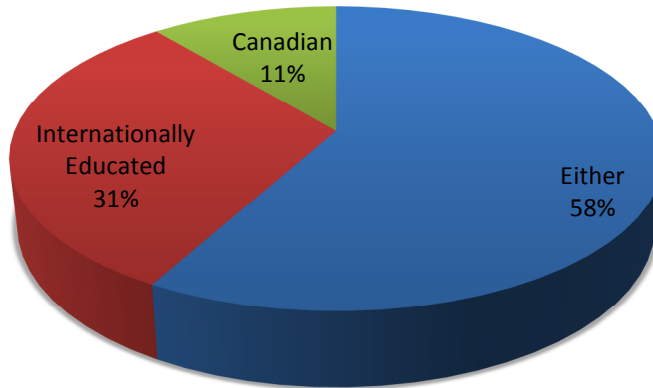
Type of Mentor

For the most part, an internationally educated MLT is preferred by IEMLTs to play the role of mentor in a Peer Support Network, but it is not necessary for the mentor to be from the same country as those receiving assistance from the Network.

The chart below shows:

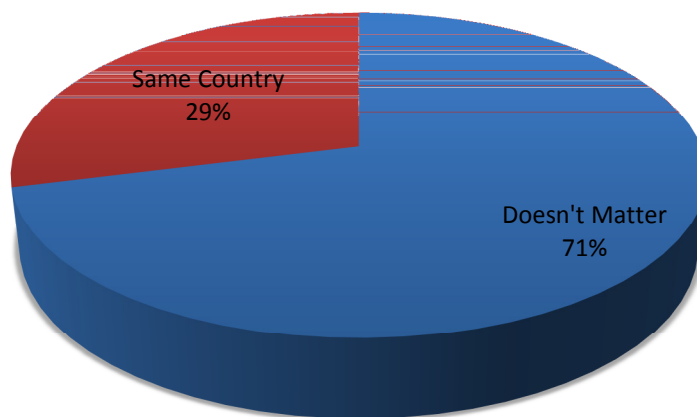
- 58% would prefer either a Canadian Educated MLT or an IEMLT as a mentor.
- 31% would exclusively prefer an IEMLT, but by adding this to the 58% who prefer either a Canadian or Internationally Educated MLT, it follows that 89% would like their mentor to be internationally educated.
- 11% would exclusively prefer a Canadian educated MLT; using the same logic above, with 58% preferring either, 69% would prefer a Canadian educated MLT.

Preference for Canadian vs. Internationally educated Mentor



In terms of the country of education for the MLT, most (71%) do not feel the mentor's country of origin makes a difference. Focus group participants also indicated that country of origin makes little difference but that a mentor should be internationally educated. However, if a mentorship relationship had the capacity to provide Canadian experience, IEMLTs did not feel that it made a difference where the mentor was educated.

Preference r.e. Mentor's Country of Origin



CSMLS Involvement

Based on both the qualitative and quantitative studies, there is generally a strong agreement among IEMLTs that CSMLS should be the organization that manages the network. At the same time, there is some concern among IEMLTs about CSMLS observing/administering the network. Likely by establishing a means of maintaining confidentiality, these concerns would be alleviated.

More specifically, 52% strongly agree (10/10 rating) that CSMLS should manage the network, and 83% agree overall (rating of 8-10).

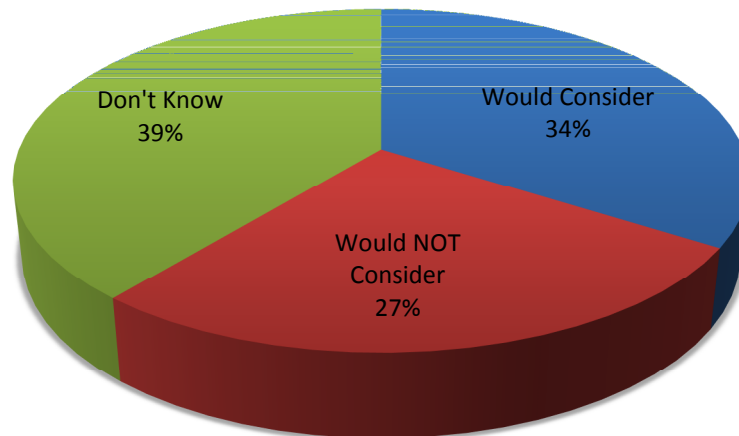
There are some concerns about privacy. These concerns are not enough to impact participation rates, but enough of a concern that privacy policies will need to be developed and actively communicated on any future Peer Support Network. The privacy concerns as indicated by the survey are as follows:

- While 18% are very concerned (10/10) about the network itself not being fully private (i.e. comments said in it could be relayed to others), 39% have some concern (8-10 rating).
- While 29% are very concerned (10/10) about their contact information being given to other members, almost half (49%) express some concern (8-10 rating of concern).
- While 20% are very concerned (10/10) about the network being observed/administered by CSMLS, 37% expressed some concern (8-10 rating of concern).

Paying to be involved in a peer support network

Respondents to the survey and participants in the focus groups were asked about their willingness to pay a fee to be a part of a peer support network. On the quantitative study, 34% said that they were willing to pay, while 27% outright rejected the notion of paying. In total, 39% could not provide an answer to that question, which suggests that there is possibly a fairly sizable portion that would consider paying, but need more information. In other words, 73% would consider paying for the network (34% who said they would pay and 39% who do not know at the moment).

Paying To Be Involved In The Network



This was confirmed in the focus groups as well. Participants generally did not mind the concept of paying, though there was some resistance expressed around paying “another cost associated with MLT”. However, participants indicated that if they were going to pay for the Peer Support Network, they needed to be “sold” on it, the way they would join any other organization, listing the benefits of membership as well as being told about potential outcomes of being involved in the network.

Sustainability of a peer support network was explored with focus group participants and through the survey by asking IEMLTs whether they would be willing to pay a fee to use a peer support network. Results from the quantitative study indicate that a fee of \$75 would be appropriate. This is concluded from the results of three questions:

- **Upper limit:** Participants were asked to indicate an amount of money that would be too high for them to consider joining the Peer Support Network – that is an amount that would result in them rejecting the concept. In total, 63% indicated an amount above \$75 would be too high for them to join. However, only 36% would reject the network at an amount lower than \$75 suggesting that \$75 is not too high for a majority of respondents.
- **Lower limit:** Participants were asked to indicate an amount of money that would be too low for them to associate with the Peer Support Network – that is an amount that would cause them to question the quality of the network. A total of 75% said any amount below \$25 would be too low, and 90% indicated an amount below \$75 would be too low, suggesting that \$75 would be a good price point.

- Amount to encourage retention: The final question addressed how high the fee should be to encourage retention, that is, what amount of money would IEMLTs be concerned about losing if they joined the Peer Support Network, paid the fee, and then left, or did not use the network. In total 39% indicated that they would be concerned about losing between \$0 - \$25; 31% indicated an amount between \$26 - \$50; 6% indicated an amount between \$51 - \$75; and 26% indicated an amount above \$75. This result supports the \$75 price point, as most respondents (74%) indicated that charging a fee up to and including \$75 would encourage them to stay in the network.

Proposed implementation model for a Peer Support Network for IEMLTs

The focus groups provided guidance regarding the possible configuration of a peer support network for internationally educated medical laboratory technologists. As a result, the following implementation model was tested in the quantitative study and worded as follows.

A peer support network would be set up for each province. There would be at least one, but possibly many experienced IEMLTs who would answer questions via an electronic bulletin board, and the answers would be posted for everyone to see and make comments. The questions could be about any aspect of the MLT licensing/employment process.

There would be face-to-face meetings that could be held every six weeks so that small groups could meet in person, though members could also contact each other directly whenever they want. Those who cannot attend because of distance would be invited via Skype or video chat. These sessions would enable people to discuss stressful issues and exchange notes/papers/documents which could be helpful for those studying for the certification exam.

The peer support network would also bring in various guests to talk about specific topics like where to find a job, how to get Canadian experience, how to work through stress or how to focus on language development.

The following results from the focus groups dictated this configuration:

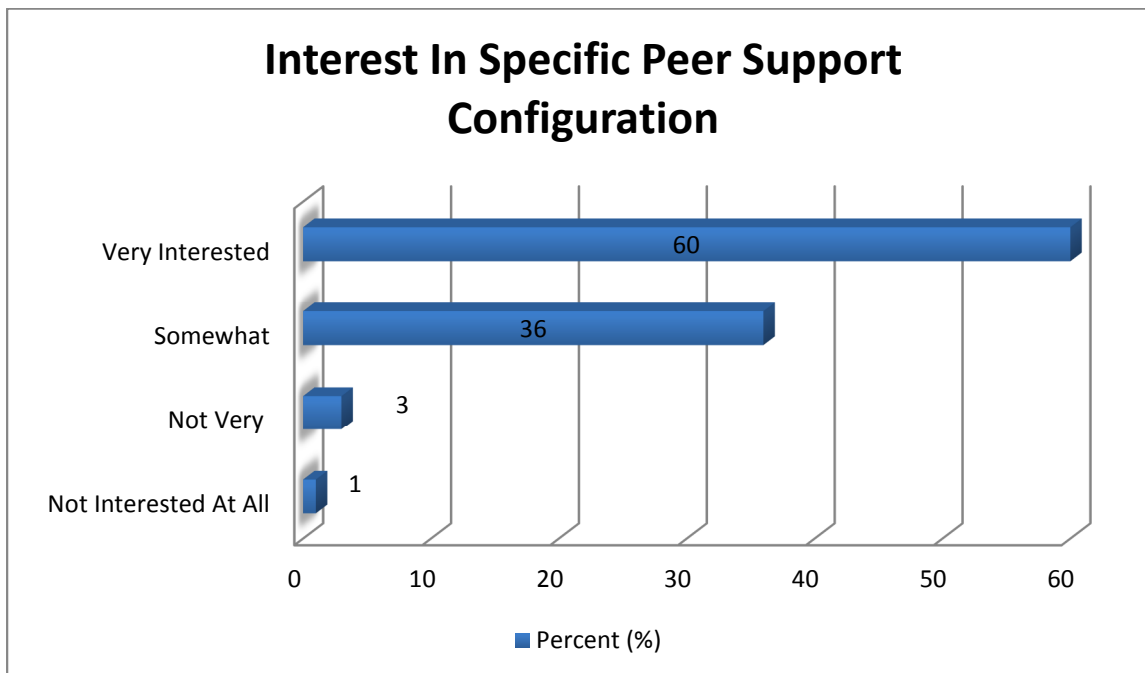
- Provincial networks were proposed because discussions in the focus groups indicated that there are sufficient differences – such as the ability to work in a lab prior to licensure and the availability of bridging programs and refresher courses – to warrant provincial or regional networks instead of a national network. The difficulty with a national network is that there is no one set of answers for all provinces. While the medical laboratory science community benefits from a centralized assessment and certification process under CSMLS there is still regional variation. Another possible model is a national network

with provincial branches. This is discussed further in the recommendations section below.

- An electronic bulletin board format was suggested because of the ability to capture and record answers to key questions, and have network users build on answers collectively. In the focus groups it was observed that one individual would ask a question, but many people were required to give a full answer. Moreover, those new to the process, or those without support, did not even know what kinds of questions to ask. An electronic bulletin board would retain the questions and answers for current and future network participants.
- The concept of one or many experienced IEMLTs answering questions resulted from interactions that occurred within seven of the eight focus groups. More experienced IEMLTs tended to answer questions of less experienced IEMLTs validating that experienced IEMLTs are the appropriate mentors/supporters.
- The broad topics of licensing and employment were highlighted in the proposed model because these were the main concerns within the focus groups. As noted above, participants were especially concerned about finding employment before gaining their license as an MLT.
- It was clear in the focus groups, which often resemble a peer support group, that IEMLTs enjoy the camaraderie and connection afforded by a face-to-face meeting. Some focus group participants even exchanged contact information at the session in order to stay in touch, which supports the need and desire of IEMLTs to have a peer support network. IEMLTs also indicated that discussing tips and strategies to navigate the stressful journey of the IEMLT certification, licensing and employment integration process helps tremendously in managing anxiety. Face-to-face meetings also help to facilitate friendships and fellowships which help to reduce stress.
- Another critical aspect of the face-to-face meetings is studying for the exam. It was felt by focus group participants that this cannot be done as effectively electronically, as people need to point to notes and books, as well as work through problems in front of each other in order to study effectively. In Calgary there are two IEMLT study/support groups for those preparing to challenge the MLT certification exam. One is organized by IEMLTs and held at a personal residence; the other is organized by Directions for Immigrants, a career resource centre based in Alberta that employs an experienced MLT to teach an exam preparation course.

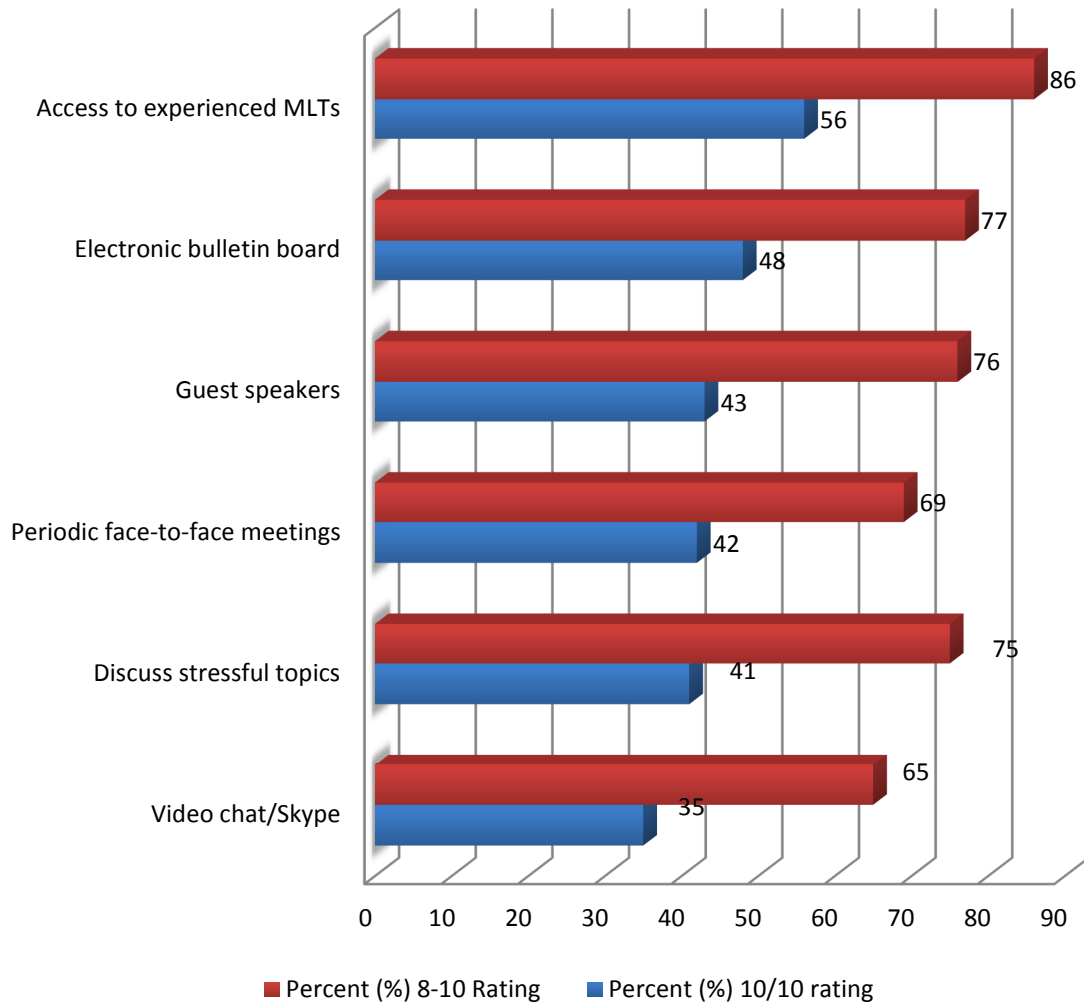
- The concept of guest speakers was proposed because there were some IEMLTs who lacked support in broader areas such as language, resume skills, job searching, and knowing the IEMLT system/market in Canada. For topics such as these, a guest speaker with expertise in these topics would better serve IEMLTs with interest in these areas. It was noted in Calgary that there are organizations within the community that provide expertise and assistance in these areas.

The quantitative results show that interest in this configuration is quite high, with 60% saying they would be “very interested” and 36% saying they would be “somewhat interested” in this model.



The following table shows that there are significant proportions who feel that key aspects of the proposed configuration would be very useful to them. Over half (56%) give a 10/10 rating to the usefulness of having access to an experienced MLT, and about half (48%) give a 10/10 rating to an Electronic Bulletin Board system that one could post to, and thus keep track of issues and answers so that everyone could discuss and share information. It is important to note, however, that using a Bulletin Board as a key component of the peer support network would likely require some justification and convincing among IEMLTs. The sense from the focus groups and even some quantitative data is that there is a preference for in-person meetings, but on a practical level, in-person meetings are not as inclusive as a bulletin board. Moreover, a bulletin board format allows for someone to post a question or issue, and have people answer it immediately, assuming that others are available and able to do so.

Perceived Usefulness of Specific Aspects Of Proposed Peer Support Network



Recommendations

Based on the findings of the literature review, environmental scan, qualitative and quantitative studies, it is recommended that CSMLS develop and administer a peer support network for internationally educated medical laboratory technologists. This section of the report includes a proposed model for the network, highlights key policy issues that need to be addressed when developing the network, and an implementation framework.

Proposed Model

We propose that the **Peer Support Network for Internationally Educated Medical Laboratory Technologists (“CSMLS Network”)** be national in scope, but contain provincial information as necessary. The CSMLS Network will be housed on a secure website accessed through the existing CSMLS website but the Network will offer both online and in-person opportunities for support.

Purpose

The purpose of the CSMLS Network will be to provide support to IEMLTs as they navigate their way through the application, assessment and licensure process through to integration into the Canadian labour market. The intention of the CSMLS Network will be to:

- ease the application, assessment, certification and licensing process for IEMLTs;
- improve IEMLT examination success rates;
- increase employment opportunities pre and post-licensure for IEMLTs;
- provide training and supports to help IEMLTs integrated into the workplace.

Target Users

The network will provide support primarily to internationally educated medical laboratory technologists who are:

- considering relocating to Canada;
- in Canada and in the process of applying, being assessed, and writing the certification exam;
- newly licensed;
- beginning their career in a Canadian workplace.

Content

The website will be divided into five content areas which may include the following information/functionality/components:

1. Credentialing and the licensing process:
 - Frequently asked questions (FAQ) including a list of refresher courses and information on bridging programs.
 - Discussion board.

2. Exam preparation:
 - List of exam preparation groups, contact information and meeting times.
 - FAQ on the exam including a list of reference materials.
 - Links to relevant documents (competency profiles, etc.).
 - *Note: It is not recommended that there be a discussion board in the exam area of the Network in order to protect exam integrity.*
3. Tips on how to gain Canadian experience prior to licensure:
 - FAQ on the topic for each province on general availability of pre-license work, job shadowing, lab tours; liability issues.
 - Discussion board for posing questions, seeking advice, and posting opportunities/looking for opportunities.
4. Finding and getting a job in Canada:
 - Discussion board.
 - Tip sheets/interactive/collaborative pages and videos on topics such as job trends across Canada, job hunting, and interview and resume skills.
5. Language, communication and culture:
 - Discussion board.
 - Tip sheets/interactive/collaborative pages on topics.
 - Links to courses and webinars offered within and outside of the profession.

Roles

A key success factor to the CSMLS Network and its ability to support IEMLTs in the licensing and integrating into the workforce is regular and ongoing involvement in the Network by the following:

Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science

It is recommended that CSMLS prepare a grant application for funding to develop and pilot the Network.

Much of the content, reference materials and links have already been developed by CSMLS (the resource guide for IEMLTs, for example), so will simply need to be repositioned on the CSMLS Network under each of the content areas listed above. However, there may be some additional content required such as additional FAQ documents, etc. These will need to be developed either by, or with substantial input from, CSMLS staff.

It is also recommended that CSMLS appoint or hire one staff member on a part-time basis to monitor the discussion boards, provide responses as appropriate, ensure that static content (FAQ's, reference materials) are kept up to date, and recruit and liaise with Provincial Peer Support Network Leaders (discussed below).

Provincial Regulators of Medical Laboratory Technology

While most of the credentialing and certification process for IEMLTs is centrally administered by CSMLS there is some variance from province-to-province in other areas such as the

opportunity for work experience prior to licensure and employment opportunities post-licensure. As such, it is recommended that provincial regulators play a role in both developing and monitoring province-specific content and discussions. Devoting 2-3 hours per week of one staff member may be sufficient, depending on the level of activity on the site and the amount of province-specific discussion. Provincial regulators may also wish to play a role on the Network Standing Committee (discussed below).

Network Standing Committee

To ensure that the Network is kept up to date and that it evolves as technology changes and the needs of users change, it is recommended that CSMLS recruit volunteers to form a Network Standing Committee that will meet every three months to review the number of users and supporters, update content and discuss policy/proposed changes to the Network. The CSMLS staff member responsible for the day-to-day management of the Network will lead the development of the agenda, bring forth proposed policy and website/structural changes, challenges with the Network and data regarding the number of users and frequency of activity on the Network.

Provincial Peer Support Network Leaders

Perhaps the most important recommendation is that CSMLS identify Provincial Peer Support Network Leaders – internationally educated medical laboratory technologists with two or more years of work experience in Canada – to volunteer their time to spend one hour per week answering questions on discussion boards and two hours every six weeks leading an in-person and/or skype/video conference peer support group to discuss topics of interest to attendees. Canadian-educated MLTs would also suffice for this role if IEMLTs are not available/identified. Provincial Leaders will post meeting times on the network. Ideally, Provincial Peer Support Network Leaders will hold one in-person and one video conference meeting every six weeks to meet the needs of both those who live near the Leader and wish to meet in-person and those living in other parts of the province or who have not yet relocated to Canada.

Provincial Peer Support Network Leaders will be given training by CSMLS via webinar or in-person on how to be a Leader and will be provided with a resource booklet to source answers to questions.

In-person meetings may include guest speakers on different topics. Guest speakers may be identified and secured by CSMLS and/or the Provincial Peer Support Network Leaders and may include CSMLS staff. To conserve travel costs, guest speakers may be limited to those who are in-province or to guest speakers who attend meetings via webcasts, video or teleconference.

In-process and Newly Licensed Internationally Educated Medical Laboratory Technologists

It is anticipated that the primary users of the CSMLS Network will be pre-arrival IEMLTs, IEMLTs in the process of being assessed and licensed, and IEMLTs up to two years post-licensure. This group will post questions on the discussion boards, attend peer support groups, become a mentee and access the reference material and links. As this group of users gains more

experience and no longer requires the Network, they will be asked to remain active on the discussion boards to help those still in the process of getting their license and integrating into the workforce. Members of this group may also become the next group of Provincial Peer Support Network Leaders.

Canada InfoNet

It is also recommended that CSMLS explore a possible partnership with Canada InfoNet to provide online mentorship to IEMLTs in addition to peer support. Mentorship programs as sophisticated as the Canada InfoNet model discussed above can be costly to develop and administer. Partnering with Canada InfoNet would make one-on-one mentorship a feasible opportunity for CSMLS because they would not need to purchase the required infrastructure (i.e. technology) or hire staff to administer the program since they are already in place at Canada InfoNet (e.g. the mentoring coach for matching mentors and mentees and monitoring the progress of the relationship).

Components of the CSMLS Network

To summarize, the CSMLS Network would be a central repository of supports for in-process and newly-licensed IEMLTs. The key components of the CSMLS Network would be:

- Online discussion boards on which IEMLTs may pose questions or seek advice and questions will be responded to by experienced IEMLTs, CSMLS staff and possibly provincial regulatory staff.
- Easy access to FAQs and related documents and information on areas of greatest interest to in-process and newly licensed IEMLTs.
- In-person peer support meetings lead by experienced IEMLTs in each province.
- Web/teleconference peer support meetings lead by same.
- If possible, an online mentorship program provided in partnership with or via Canada InfoNet. This mentorship program would be available to those already settled in Canada, and pre-arrival MLTs as the mentorship relationship takes place online.

Key Policy Issues

Sustainability

There are development and ongoing costs associated with the proposed peer support network. It is recommended that CSMLS explore the following options to determine the feasibility of sustaining a peer support network:

1. Discuss the findings of this project with other healthcare professions (e.g. physiotherapy, occupational therapy, respiratory therapy, pharmacy) to see if there is any interest in collaborating to provide peer support across professions and thereby to share the cost of maintaining those supports.

2. Meet with Canada InfoNet to discuss the possibility of partnering with them to provide one-on-one online mentorship opportunities to IEMLTs as part of the Peer Support Network.
3. Following steps one and two, complete a cost assessment to build and maintain the website.
4. Once the cost assessment is complete, it is suggested that CSMLS apply for government funding to develop the CSMLS Network and pilot it for the first 1-2 years.

Development costs will include building the website; developing the content; developing policies, protocols and waivers; promoting the Network; and building a training program and manual for CSMLS staff and Provincial Peer Support Network Leaders.

Ongoing costs include webmaster fees and costs associated with website maintenance, upgrading, and tools to analyse key metrics; staff time to monitor the website, update content, recruit volunteers and provide support to the Network Standing Committee; possibly regulator staff time to monitor provincial content.

To make the Network sustainable in the long term it is recommended that the costs associated with maintaining the Network are paid by IEMLTs in one of the following ways:

- a. Charging a membership fee to users to have access to the Network: This model is the most transparent because users of the Network choose to become members by paying a fee. As discussed above, the recommended fee to users would be \$75. Although, this amount may need to be adjusted based on the cost assessment of the Network and the average number of members. It would be strongly recommended that experienced IEMLTs who provide support to their less experienced/un-licensed colleagues would not have to pay to contribute to the Network. In sum, this model involves additional administrative support as staff would need to set and collect fees, etc. There is also the risk of not having a sufficient number of members to pay for the ongoing costs associated with the Network. Also, a low number of members may result in an inactive Network.
- b. Through an increase in membership fees: This model offers a broad distribution of costs as all licensed medical laboratory technologists (Canadian and internationally educated) absorb the costs associated with the Network through their annual membership fees to CSMLS. The weakness in this model is that Canadian educated medical laboratory technologists are in essence paying for a service that they may not use. However, there are areas of content such as “getting a job”, “exam preparation” and “communication and culture” as it relates to lab culture, that may be of interest to pre-license and newly-licensed Canadian educated MLTs. If this model is chosen as the ideal one for sustainability reasons, it is recommended that the scope of the Network be broadened to meet the needs of Canadian educated MLTs as well as internationally educated.

- c. Through an increase in membership fees for IEMLTs: This model may not be possible as it would result in different membership fees for Canadian and international applicants, despite the fact that all have passed the same certification exam and have the same licence. However, this would be one way to distribute costs across a wider base, as there are approximately 1,200 licensed, internationally educated medical laboratory technologists across Canada. In this model, licensed IEMLTs would essentially be paying for the Network for pre-license IEMLTs, but those same pre-license IEMLTs will do the same in future. New international applicants would be given a membership to the Network at the point of applying to CSMLS for an assessment (with the opportunity to opt out).
- d. Through an increase in application fees for IEMLTs: In this model, all international applicants to CSMLS automatically become members of the peer support network (with an opportunity to opt out). This model is ideal for targeting the intended audience as it draws IEMLTs to the Network at the earliest stage in the process; a stage when they need a great deal of support. However, there are approximately 200 new international applicants per year, and depending on the costs of the Network, this could result in a substantial increase to the application fees, an amount that is already high for applicants and is subsidized by the CSMLS membership dues because it is not cost recovery. This option is unlikely for CSMLS given these factors.

Privacy & Confidentiality

It is recommended that users of the Network agree to terms regarding privacy and confidentiality prior to using the Network. The terms will be intended to protect both the user of the Network and the Network administrator (CSMLS). CSMLS will also need to ensure that personal information provided for the Network is secure. CSMLS staff responsible for the managing the Network will need to monitor discussion boards to ensure that the content does not violate personal privacy.

As discussed in the research above, confidentiality was a concern for IEMLTs and it has been found that a safe environment in which users feel secure is one of the primary success factors of a peer support network. Given this, it is suggested that members of the Network have an opportunity to choose an anonymous username after they have paid fees (if applicable) and signed waivers (if applicable).

Exam content

CSMLS staff will need to diligently monitor discussion content on the topic of the certification exam to protect the integrity of exam content. It is recommended that there not be a discussion board in the exam section of the Network for this reason. However, exam discussions will likely materialize elsewhere in the Network, so this will need to be monitored on a daily basis with particular attention to the timing of the exam cycle.

Risk

One risk of this proposed Network is that inaccurate information is shared with others. While there are ways of mitigating this risk (by having CSMLS and provincial regulatory staff monitor content and by training volunteers and providing resource documents), it is still possible that inaccurate information will be passed onto others which negatively impacts Network users. As such it is recommended that all members sign a terms of use agreement prior to joining the Network which will be drafted by a lawyer for CSMLS and which will alert members of this possibility and remove CSMLS from being liable, should undo harm be caused as a result of the Network. There also needs to be a clause allowing CSMLS to remove inflammatory, unprofessional or inaccurate information from the Network without consulting the author.

Proposed Implementation Plan

<p>Very Short Term:</p> <p>Secure funding to develop and pilot a peer support network</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the outcomes of this project with other health professions to determine any interest in collaboration. • Meet with Canada InfoNet to discuss the possibility of partnering to provide online mentorship to IEMLTs. • Complete a cost assessment to develop and maintain the Network. • Determine, in principle, which of the funding models discussed above will be used to make the Network sustainable (providing information on sustainability will help to secure external funding (below)). • Prepare proposals seeking external funding to develop and pilot the Network. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential funders include: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Foreign Credential Recognition Office, Health Canada, Federal/Provincial Ministries of Labour, Provincial Ministries of Citizenship and Immigration.
<p>Short Term:</p> <p>Develop the Network</p> <p>Pilot the Network</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare terms of reference for the Network Standing Committee and recruit members. • Develop a job description and hire/appoint a Network Manager to manage the Network. • Collect content for the Network from the following sources: CSMLS, provincial regulatory bodies for medical laboratory technology, government sources (for job trends, etc.), professional organizations and other professions (interview and resume tips; language communication and culture webinars, etc.). • Develop new content as required. • Hire a web developer to build the website for the Network. • Develop policies, protocols and a Terms of Use Agreement for the Network. • Prepare a volunteer job description for the Provincial Peer Support Network Leaders. • Develop a training program and resource guide for Provincial Peer Support Network Leaders. • Recruit and train Leaders from each jurisdiction. • Pilot-test the Network.
<p>Medium Term:</p> <p>Launch the Network</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the Network. • Launch the Network. • Begin collecting fees to support the ongoing maintenance of the Network.
<p>Ongoing:</p> <p>Maintain and upgrade the Network</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSMLS staff monitor and contribute to the site on a daily/weekly basis. • Provincial regulatory staff monitor the provincial content on the site on a weekly/monthly basis. • Network Standing Committee meets every six weeks to update content, discuss traffic, performance and challenges. • Conduct annual reviews of best practices in peer support networks for internationally educated professionals and update the network accordingly.

Works Cited

- Austin, Zubin. "Bridging To Success: A Learning Day about Bridging Programs in Regulated Professions," Ontario Regulators for Access Consortium (2008), http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/english/publications/br_to_success.shtml.
- Austin, Zubin and Rocchi, M. "Bridging education in pharmacy: The International Pharmacy Graduate Program in Ontario, Canada," *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 68(5) (2004): 1-11.
- Austin, Zubin. "What is learnworthy? Lessons from group socialization theory for professional education and continuing professional development," *Pharmacy Education*, 2, (2002): 161-166.
- Canada InfoNet, www.canadainfonet.org.
- Classroom 2.0, <http://www.classroom20.com>.
- CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses. "Alumni Networking Group", <http://www.care4nurses.org/what-we-do/alumni/>.
- Doctors Without Borders. "Peer Support Network", <http://www.msf.ca/recruitment/peer-support/>.
- ERIEC. "Mentorship Program", <http://www.eriec.ca/programs/>.
- Harvard Business School Press. "Beyond Traditional Mentoring: Peers and Networks", excerpted from *Coaching and Mentoring: How to Develop Top Talent and Achieve Stronger Performance (Harvard Business Essentials)*. Boston, Mass., 2006.
- International Networking for Educational Transformation (iNet), "Nottinghamshire Local Education Authority (UK) Heads Count Peer Support Program", <http://www.sst-inet.net/resources/olc/papers/peersupportforprincipals.aspx>.
- Nottinghamshire County Council, <http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/home/learningandwork/educationandachievement/cpd/cpd-headscount/cpd-headscount-peers-primary.htm>.
- Roland, Karen and Clinton Beckford. "Supporting Associate Teaching and Mentoring of Teacher Candidates: Building a Community of Practice," *Literacy Information and Computer Education Journal*, Volume 1, Issue 2, (June 2010), http://www.infonomics-society.org/LICEJ/Supporting%20Associate%20Teaching%20and%20Mentoring%20of%20Teacher%20Candidates_Building%20a%20Community%20of%20Practice.pdf.
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. "Peer Support Program for IMGs", <http://www.racgp.org.au/afp/200504/200504heal.pdf>.
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. "Professional Peer Support Group", <http://www.racgp.org.au/Content/NavigationMenu/PracticeSupport/peersupport/Peersupportnetwork/ProfessionalPeerSupportGroups.pdf>.
- St. Michael's Hospital. *Making Connections : A New Model of Mentoring for Internationally Trained Professionals*. Toronto, 2003.
- The Association of Professional Engineers, Geologists and Geophysicists of Alberta. "Mentoring Program", <http://www.apegga.org/members/Mentoring/tocGENERAL.html>.

TRIEC. "Immigrant Networks", <http://www.triec.ca/programs/ImmigrantNetworks/FactsandStats>.

York Region Neighbourhood Services/Mentorprises. *Mentoring : 5 Steps to Career Success*. Toronto, ON: York Region Neighbourhood Services, 1998.

Appendix A: Focus Group Guide

IEMLT Peer Support Networks Focus Group Discussion Guide

Introduction & Instructions (10 Minutes)

As I mentioned, we are going to discuss support networks for IEMLT's in the group. What I'm interested in is **your experience and opinions only**. For example, we may be asking if you want a support network to be "in-person" or "on-line", or whether there should be a cost to join a support network. I am not so much interested in comments like "People don't like to have to pay for anything" or "People want one-on-one interaction" – I am much more interested in your direct opinions and experiences, and not how you feel others will respond to various ideas we discuss.

Experience To Date (25 Minutes)

- I would like each of you to tell me where you are now (i.e. working, studying, writing the exam, etc...) and provide a brief story of what the experience has been like to get to the point you are at from the point of view of someone who was internationally educated outside of Canada. What was easy? What was difficult? **[Hear from everyone]**
- What were some of the difficulties you encountered along the way? How did these difficulties make you feel? How did you overcome them? What difficulties are still left unresolved?
- Was it easy to meet people who were going through the same experiences you were having? Where did you meet these people? Where would you have expected to meet these people? Would meeting these people be valuable to you? Did you meet anyone through other support networks that helped you as you were becoming an MLT?
- What methods of support did you have available to you? That is, what, if anything, made the process easier for you?
 - Did anyone use an existing support network, or group for help along the way? What about for issues of general immigration – did anyone use an agency, group or support network in **any way** to assist in immigration or integration in general? What were your experiences like? Did you find anything of help in using those groups as it related directly to your process of becoming certified as an MLT, or finding a job as an MLT?
 - Do any of you use a support system now, or would you recommend one based on your experience – think broadly, or tell me about any support system that was useful to you throughout your entire immigration and integration into Canada. **[These could include any support network – language, settlement, culture, procedural, etc...]**
 - What was the best piece of advice that you received during the process? Where did you get it from?

- Given what you know now, what methods of support did you wish you had?
- Do you feel that Canadian educated individuals have any sort of advantage compared to internationally educated individuals?

Discussing Ancillary Support Issues (30 minutes)

- As I mentioned, we are discussing a support system/network for IEMLT's. Given what we have discussed, how do you think this could be of help to you? What would you want out of it?
- Another way of looking at the question is this – when were things most stressful for you? When along the way did you feel that you needed support the most (whether or not you were able to get it?) Focus on:
 - In home country
 - Once landed in Canada
 - Learning about Canadian culture/language
 - During application process
 - During studying for exam
 - During bridging program/classes/education
 - After exam
 - Finding a job
 - Integrating into the workplace (social, technical, cultural aspects)
- What were some of the feelings that may have held you back while you were going through the process? (i.e. fears, inadequacies, anger, feeling alone). How do you think you could have been helped with those feelings? How could a support network help you with those feelings?
- What kinds of tips, tricks, inside advice or “wisdom” do you wish you would have known as you were going through the process (e.g. types of exam questions, how to finance bridging programs, where/how to find jobs, dealing with personal life vs. work)?
- How strongly did or does your personal life impact your progress as an MLT? Is this something that should be a topic addressed by a support network for IEMLT's?
- Would you expect a support network for IEMLT's just to focus on knowledge, theory, issues directly related to IEMLT's, or would you expect it to offer broader services, such as language, culture, general education, community support as well? Are there other sources of support for these? Are they applicable to your jobs as IEMLT's? That is, for those who have sought support from these networks, do you feel that you learn enough such that it can easily be applied to your work environment?
- Where do you presently get peer-to-peer interaction? Where did you get it along the way to where you are now? Where do you presently get mentorship? Where did you get it along the way to where you are now? Do you find your present peer-to-peer interaction and mentorship effective? How can it be more effective?
- **Hand-Out List Of Topics**

- Which ones interest you as items you wish you either had support with, or wish that you had support now for. Just look and see which ones interest you, and which ones catch your attention. **[Go around and ask which ones people chose and which ones are of interest to them]**. Follow-up questions could include:
 - Where do you get support on this?
 - How could it be of help to you?
 - Who should be offering this to you? Is a support network for IEMLT's a viable option for this kind of support
- Would you join this network or expect to get:
 - Friendship
 - Contacts/networking that would lead towards a job

Support Network Questions (40 Minutes)

We have spent the last little while understanding how you have used support networks, as well as understanding the kind of support that you want. We'll now put it all together and discuss the structure of the support network itself. It is possible that I'll be asking some questions that may need additional qualification or clarification. Note as well, I'm not looking to design the "optimal" program, or come-out with a fully functioning support program – rather, I just want to gather some basic opinions that will help me and my colleagues put this together.

- You really have an opportunity to be supported by peers (i.e. people who have recently gone through the same experience as you) or mentors (i.e. people who are very experienced in the MLT field)...
 - Given what you, yourself want, and what we have discussed as your own wants and needs, what kind of support would work better for you – being supported by peers or mentors (NB – participants are not held to a particular answer)
 - What, for you, are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
- How important is it for you to have a work or clinical component to this kind of support?
- Does the nationality of the support-giving individual make a difference to you (i.e. should the person providing support have gone through the same experiences as you). Does the experience have to be the same for all functions like:
 - Technical/scientific support
 - Fitting-in with co-workers
 - Taking the exam
 - Providing support on immigration issues like language and culture
- What kind of training would you expect the support providers to have? What kind of training should the network provide these individuals?
 - What about professional experience? How long should they have been working?

- Should these individuals be compensated or recognized in some way?
- Would your use of the network be influenced by what country the person was from? Could proper training of individuals help address any concerns you have?
- Are you concerned at all about privacy issues? Would privacy impact your use of such a network? Are there ways to address privacy issues
- Would you have a preference towards an on-line or in-person support network? A hybrid of the two?
- Should CSMLS administrate the network? Do you have concerns about privacy in this instance?
- Would you be willing to pay for such a network?
 - Under what conditions would you be willing to pay?
 - What would you expect to pay?
 - What would be too much under any circumstances?
 - What would be too little to make you doubt the effectiveness of it?
 - What would be an amount that would get you stay in the program because if you left, you'd feel that you've wasted money?
- Would you want in-person meetings, on-line meetings, conference calls? Does it make a difference?

Closing

Is there anything else that we have not covered about support networks that would be of interest to you?

Appendix B: Recruitment Screener for Focus Groups

RECRUIT NO MORE THAN SIX PER GROUP.

Hello, may I please speak with _____ [Name on list] **IF UNAVAILABLE, ARRANGE A CALL-BACK.**

Hello, my name is _____ and I am calling from Thinklounge Market Research. A few weeks ago in June, you responded to an email from CSMLS, asking if you wanted to participate in some focus groups regarding a Peer-Support Network for Internationally Trained Medical Laboratory Technologists. **[IF THEY ARE UNAWARE, SAY “You received an email from Kim Burke from CSMLS about some research into Peer-Support-Networks. You then went to our website, Thinklounge, where you answered some questions, saying that you would be interested in participating in a focus group.]**

This call is to both tell you about the focus groups, and invite you to them.

We are conducting the focus groups in:

Mississauga, July 14 at either 6:00pm or 8:00pm

Vancouver, July 18 at either 6:00pm or 8:00pm

Calgary, July 19 at either 6:00pm or 8:00pm

On-Line East, July 21 at 6:00pm EST

On-Line West, July 21 at 9:00pm EST

I just want to confirm a few things:

1) Do you live near the city in which the focus groups are being conducted?

Yes

No **TERMINATE**

2) Have you passed the CSMLS exam?

Yes **ASK Q3a&b**

No **SKIP TO INVITATION**

3a) How long ago did you pass the exam?

_____ Write In

3b) Are you working as a laboratory technologist now?

Yes

No

INVITATION

We would like to invite you to participate in the focus groups we are having. We are providing \$50 to attend the sessions. Each session is 2 hours long. There will be about six other Internationally Educated MLT's in the session. The Focus Groups are being lead by a professional researcher. Please bring photo-ID with you. At this point, you cannot bring anyone else with you to participate in the groups.

The group date is **[Insert Date]** You can choose to attend a group at 6:00pm or 8:00pm. Which do you choose:

6:00pm

8:00pm

The location of the groups is _____ **[INSERT LOCATION]**

NOTE FOR MISSISSAUGA GROUP AT 6:00PM:

If you are inviting people to this group from Hamilton, Brampton or Toronto, please remind them of traffic and ensure their commitment to arrive on time.

Appendix C: Questionnaire

WELCOME TO THE CSMLS PEER SUPPORT NETWORK SURVEY



This study will help CSMLS understand the kinds of services and supports that IEMLTs want from a Peer Support Network. The network itself may help make the process of becoming an MLT in Canada easier. Your participation is very important to help determine how such a network could be established.

The survey will take no longer than 10 minutes complete, and if you need to, you can exit and return to the survey to complete it.

INSTRUCTIONS

Do not use your browser's forward or back arrows. For navigation, please use the arrows included in the study. **[DUFFERIN – PLEASE INCLUDE INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO END STUDY, AND ANY OTHER STANDARD INSTRUCTIONS YOU USE.]**

CONTINUE

SCREENER

S1a) Please indicate which best describes you...

I have not passed the CSMLS National Certification Examination **ASK S1B**

I have passed the CSMLS National Certification Examination **SKIP TO S2**

S1b) Which stage of the certification process are you in right now? [**Check one only...**]

I am gathering my documents for credential review

I am having my credentials reviewed now

I am studying for the exam

I am writing the exam, waiting to write the exam, or am attempting the exam again

Go to Question S3

S2) Now that you have your license, which best describes how long you have been licensed and working as an MLT in Canada...

I have not started working as a Medical Laboratory Technologist yet

I have been working under 1 year (1-11 months)

- I have been working between 1 and 2 years (12-23 months)
- I have been working between 2 and 3 years (24-35 months)
- I have been working more than 3 years (36 months or more)

S3) MLTs require an education from a post secondary institution. Did you receive your post secondary education...

- In Canada **TERMINATE**
- Outside of Canada

S4a) In which province or territory do you presently live?

- British Columbia
- Alberta
- Saskatchewan
- Manitoba
- Ontario
- Quebec
- New Brunswick
- Nova Scotia
- Prince Edward Island
- Newfoundland

- Northwest Territories
- Yukon Territory
- Nunavut

I live outside Canada → **Terminate with a screen that says “Thank You for your participation. The rest of the survey must be completed by individuals who live in Canada.”**

S4b) Do you live in a...

- Major Canadian City (Population over 500,000)
- Urban area (Population between 250,000 - 499,999)
- Large City (125,000 - 249,999)
- Small City (25,000 - 124,999)
- A rural or remote area (Population under 25,000)

S5) Is English your first language?

- Yes
- No

S6) From what country did you receive your training as a Medical Laboratory Technologist? [DUFFERIN – INCLUDE LIST OF COUNTRIES. ADD AN “OTHER” AND “DO NOT WISH TO SAY” OPTION.]

S7) How many years have you been in Canada?

_____ Number Of Years **DO NOT ACCEPT 0**

Section 1- Getting Through the Process

1.1a) As you go through the process of becoming an MLT, are any of the following people helping you along the way? **[CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]**

- A friend who is ahead of you in the MLT process
- A family member who is ahead of you in the MLT process
- A family member not involved in MLT
- A friend not involved in MLT

IF ANY OF ABOVE CHECKED, ASK 1.1b. IF NONE CHECKED, SKIP TO 1.2

1.1b) Please check all the ways this person helps you: **[CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY]**

- Gives moral support
- Provides help with studying for/passing the exam
- Provides information on how to find employment
- Introduces you to other people who can help you find a job
- Introduces you to people who are in the same situation as you
- Other_____

1.2) Would you say it is very easy, somewhat easy, not very easy or not easy at all to find and talk to other internationally educated individuals who are going through the same process as you of becoming an MLT? **[CHECK ONE ONLY]**

- Very Easy
- Somewhat Easy
- Not Very Easy
- Not Easy At All

1.3) On a scale of 1to 10, where 10 means Exceptionally Valuable, and 1 means Not Valuable at all, how valuable would it be for you to know...

	Not Very Valuable							Exceptionally Valuable		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Other individuals at the same stage as you in becoming an MLT										
Other individuals who are further ahead of you in the process										
Licensed Internationally Educated Medical Laboratory Technologists (IEMLTs)										
Licensed Canadian MLTs										

1.4a) Do you have training or certification as a Medical Laboratory Assistant (MLS)?

- Yes
- No

1.4b) Have you worked as a Medical Laboratory Assistant?

- Yes
- No

1.5) Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following – ***“I wish it were easier to get experience in Canadian labs during the process of becoming an MLT in Canada.”***

Disagree Strongly							Agree Strongly		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Section 2 – Investigating a Peer Support Network

The next set of questions asks you about your opinions towards a Peer Support Network for Internationally Educated Medical Laboratory Technologists **{Click to continue}**

2.1) A peer support network would be something that you could join with other internationally educated individuals. The peer support network may provide support and advice on issues such as credentialing, studying for the exam, networking, gaining experience and finding a job. The peer support network is intended to provide you with a broad range of ways to help you and is not specifically a way to get tutoring. The peer support network would answer questions that you have and ultimately make the process easier and quicker. How interested would you be in being a part of this kind of network?

Not Interested							Very Interested		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

2.2a) The following are some benefits that could be available from a peer support network. How important is each to you? A 10 means it is very important and a 1 means it is not important at all. **[ROTATE]**

2.2b) Which one do you think is the biggest benefit of a peer support network? **[CHECK ONE ONLY]**

	Not Very Important							Very Important			2.2b
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Biggest
Talking with others going through the process of becoming an MLT in Canada											
Getting support with stress											
Getting advice on how to get your credentials											

reviewed																				
Becoming familiar with Canadian language and how MLTs communicate																				
Becoming familiar with Canadian culture to help you better relate to MLTs and other colleagues																				
Finding out about where to get Canadian experience before getting your MLT license																				
Receiving help and tips about studying for the exam																				
Finding out about job openings, like knowing who is hiring MLTs and where the jobs are located																				
Learning from and talking to IEMLTs about their experience with the process, and how they found a job																				
Being given a tour of a lab/facility, or doing job shadowing																				

2.3a) Part of the peer support network could involve mentoring – where you ask questions and receive answers about becoming an MLT in Canada from someone who has been through the process. Mentoring may also help you work through the stress involved in becoming an MLT. Please indicate your preference for each of the following mentoring formats... **[ROTATE]**

	Do Not Prefer At All				5	6	7	Strongly Prefer		
	1	2	3	4				8	9	10
In a group setting, where many individuals can ask questions and receive answers together.										
A one-on-one format, where you would be put in contact with a mentor and the contact would just occur between you and the mentor directly.										

2.3b) The peer support network could meet in a number of ways. Please indicate your preference for each of the following formats

	Do Not Prefer At All				5	6	7	Strongly Prefer		
	1	2	3	4				8	9	10
In person meetings										
Video-chat/Skype/conference call										
Electronic Bulletin Board/Social Media format (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)										

- 2.4a) The peer support network may have an experienced MLT who provides mentoring and support to you. Should this person be... [Rotate First Two. The third option should remain last. Select one only.]

A Canadian Educated MLT
 An Internationally Educated MLT

Either

- 2.4b) If an internationally educated MLT is chosen to help mentor the peer support group, would it make a difference to you which home country they are from?

Yes, I would want the mentor to be from the same country as me
 No, the country makes no difference

- 2.5) How strongly do you agree with the position that CSMLS should be the organization that administers the Peer Support Network?

Disagree strongly that CSMLS should administer the network										Agree strongly that CSMLS should administer the network	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		

- 2.6) How concerned would you be with each of the following privacy issues in a peer support network?

	Not concerned at all				Very Concerned					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Things that you have said in the network being told to other people										
Your personal contact information being given to others in the network										
CSMLS observing, moderating or administering the network and possibly seeing your comments										

- 2.7a) Would you be willing to pay any money, even just a small amount per year, to join the network?

Yes
 No
 Don't know

- 2.7b) Regardless of what you said above, how much money...

Would be too much – an amount that you would say that would be too high for you not to join the network_____

Would be too little – where you feel that the peer support network wouldn't be much good at all _____

Would be an amount that would get you to stay in the program. That is an amount that you would be concerned about losing if you decided to quit the peer support program? _____

2.8a) One idea for a peer support network would be the following...

A peer support network would be set up for each province. There would be at least one, but possibly many experienced IEMLTs who would answer questions via an electronic bulletin board, and the answers would be posted for everyone to see and make comments. The questions could be about any aspect of the MLT licensing/employment process.

There would be face-to-face meetings that could be held every six weeks so that small groups could meet in person, though members could also contact each other directly whenever they want. Those who cannot attend because of distance would be invited via Skype or video chat. These sessions would enable people to discuss stressful issues and exchange notes/papers/documents which could be helpful for those studying for the certification exam.

The peer support network would also bring in various guests to talk about specific topics like where to find a job, how to get Canadian experience, how to work through stress or how to focus on language development.

How interested would you be in this exact kind of peer support network?

- Very interested
- Somewhat interested
- Not very interested
- Not interested at all

2.9b) How useful to you are each of the following about the above peer support network?

	Not Useful							Very Useful			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Having easy access to an experienced MLT who can answer your questions											
Using an electronic bulletin board to post and keep track of issues and answers, so that everyone could see relevant discussions and information											
Being able to discuss stressful topics with other individuals going through the same process as you											
Periodic face-to-face meetings											
Holding face to face meetings with video chat or Skype so those in remote areas can attend											
Bringing in various guests to address specific topics											

2.9c) Are there any additional comments you wish to provide on the set up of a peer support network?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME