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Dustin R Bunch, et al.

The 2018 AACC/SYCL PhD Clinical Chemist Compensation Survey.

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Guest: Dr. Bunch is the Assistant Director for Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Informatics at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio.

Randye Kaye:

Hello and welcome to this edition of "JALM Talk," from *The Journal of Applied Laboratory Medicine*, a publication of the American Association for Clinical Chemistry. I'm your host, Randye Kaye.

Non-physician doctoral scientists practicing clinical chemistry play an invaluable role in many facets of healthcare. Like pathologists, doctoral clinical chemists are recognized by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services as qualified to serve as laboratory directors of clinical diagnostics laboratories.

Clinical chemists may work in academic medical centers, community hospitals, or commercial laboratories and act as liaisons between the clinical laboratory and healthcare providers. Clinical chemists may also yield their expertise in positions within government, industry, or for in vitro diagnostic medical device companies.

Due to the highly specialized nature of clinical chemistry, publicly available salary information for doctoral clinical chemists is scarce. Thus, there is a need for a salary data which may provide a reference point for salary negotiations and may aid in addressing wage gaps experienced by women and minorities.

A Special Report published in the March 2020 issue of *The Journal of Applied Laboratory Medicine* describes the results of a self-reported compensation survey that was conducted by the American Association for Clinical Chemistry's Society for Young Clinical Laboratorians (SYCL). The report evaluates how compensation for doctoral clinical chemists varies with geographic region and cost-of-living index, years of experience, gender, and employment sector.

The first author of the report is Dr. Dustin Bunch. Dr. Bunch is the Assistant Director for Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Informatics at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, and he is our guest for this podcast. Welcome Dr. Bunch.

Dustin Bunch:

Thank you.

Randye Kaye: What led AACC's Society for Young Clinical Laboratorians, or SYCL, to conduct this survey?

Dustin Bunch: So, for a couple of reasons, recent graduates are requesting more information because the last survey had been done in 2013. And they were using it as a way to set their salaries. We also realized there was a lack of reliable information for experienced board-certified clinical chemists. The Association of American Medical Colleges, AAMC, does a salary report for PhD clinical pathologists. It is focused more on academic positions and they partition the country based on geographical region and type of institution. So, their research would actually miss industry and reference laboratories, which we play a big part in.

Randye Kaye: Okay. Well how was the survey conducted? Can you briefly describe it, who is the target audience? What kinds of questions were asked and how did they analyze the data?

Dustin Bunch: We assembled the survey in surveymonkey.com. A link was available over a two-week period in April of 2018. It was sent by email to all active ABCC diplomats. It was posted on AACC's Artery and it was also sent to ComACC clinical chemistry program directors to send to their past trainees. We generally targeted board-certified clinical chemists in any work segment. The groups that we focused on primarily, were the American Board of Clinical Chemistry, the National Registry of Certified Chemists, and the American Association of Bioanalysts.

We also took a look at different certifications that were available, such as the American Board of Medical Genetics and Genomics, American Board of Medical Microbiology, the American Board of Pathology, the Canadian Academy of Clinical Biochemistry, and the American Society for Clinical Pathology.

The questions focused on multiple forms of compensation and benefits, and also included gender, time since board-certified, and the state they worked in. The data was analyzed using R and Excel, and we decided to split things into categories, since most of the data was categorical rather than quantitative.

Randye Kaye: All right. Thank you, now the data are presented with salary ranges rather than actual salaries, can you tell us why?

Dustin Bunch: Leading up to doing the survey, we actually had some conversation with people in the field and one of the things that they were worried about was their salary information being shared. To address this worry and improve the participation rate for the survey, we did not collect identifying information and we also created these salary bends rather

than individual salaries. Most people found this satisfactory, but it turned the quantitative data into categorical data, which limited the data analysis somewhat.

Randy Kaye: I noticed the ranges are compared across different cost-of-living index values across the United States. Are there some limitations to analyzing the data this way?

Dustin Bunch: The biggest issue that we encountered was being able to get the cost-of-living index. So, the cost-of-living index we used was from the Missouri Economic Research and Information Center. They get their data from the Council for Community and Economic Research survey. That survey is voluntary and focuses on urban areas only. Two issues were created from the way the survey was performed; it was missing data and it lacked rural values.

Randy Kaye: All right. Thank you. Now finally, is there anything you would change about this survey, maybe if another salary survey is conducted by AACC in the future?

Dustin Bunch: There were a couple of issues that were brought to our attention. One of those issues was that we did not include the Canadian Academy of Clinical Biochemistry. If we were to do this again, we would include them. The second major issue that was pointed out to us, was that this survey was voluntary in nature and so, to address this issue, it would be beneficial to get the identified data from finance departments from different employers, very similar to how other surveys are conducted. I do think this would be harder in some work segments than others, specifically the research organizations and the reference laboratories.

Randy Kaye: That was Dr. Dustin Bunch from Nationwide Children's Hospital describing the JALM Special Report, "The 2018 AACC Cycle PhD Clinical Chemist Compensation Survey." Thanks for tuning in to this episode of JALM Talk. See you next time and don't forget to submit something for us to talk about.