LESSONS LEARNED

The power of safety!

There once was a laboratory, like many laboratories, where good science was done by good people in an overcrowded, messy laboratory. These workers were so busy that they never had time to clean up, particularly the hallways which were filled with carts, boxes, and miscellaneous “good stuff.” The lab chief was always reminding the workers that all of the “stuff” was supposed to be on one side of the hallway so there would be a clear path, but nothing ever seemed to change. One day at a lab meeting (which took place in the hallway) the lights were turned off, a worker was blindfolded and told that there was a fire in the building and the hallway was filled with smoke. All the worker had to do to get to safety was to crawl down the hallway to the exit door. Unfortunately the worker could not quickly navigate the hallway and “died.”

Nothing else was said, but the hallway was cleared in less than one hour!

Lessons learned:
1. Safety has to be personal and important to the individual.
2. There are clever ways to remind workers that their rules which they may think are unnecessary.

Linda Martin, Associate Editor

The power of group persuasion!

Once there was a laboratory that handled quite a lot of human blood. Although the institution offered hepatitis B vaccination every year as part of the adult immunization program, few of the workers in the lab had received the vaccine. The lab director, who was concerned about the lack of immunization, decided to try something new. He asked one of the more energetic lab workers to schedule everyone for immunization and to personally escort them to the clinic. The workers who agreed to receive the vaccine drew straws to determine who would go first for the “shot.” The coordinator also reminded everyone when it was time for the booster shots. The percentage immunized workers increased from about 30% to 90%.

Lessons learned: Non-compliance and compliancy may be changed by experimenting with new approaches to solve the problem. Involvement of the workers in the solution is key to success.

Linda Martin, Associate Editor