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Value your compound management team! ▼

Who do you call when you've dropped your plate of samples and you have to run the assay today? When you run out of material, who is the first group you think of? When you need to do more work with fewer people; when you have to change your work process, who can you turn to for assistance? The answer to all these questions is your local compound group. They have several titles: compound bank, compound control, compound services, compound management, but all focus on the same goal: delivering quality products in an agreed timeframe to expedite the drug discovery process.

The compound management (CM) group of the past was viewed as just an inventory and sample delivery group. Their remit, beyond weighing a solid sample into a container was basically non-existent. When new technologies and science such as combinatorial chemistry and HTS came into play, the challenges of liquid handling woke up the rest of the drug discovery process to the challenges the compound groups had been facing all along. This afforded the compound teams an opportunity to position themselves into a more intricate part of discovery research. So why does

a group that plays such a central role in drug discovery always have to justify its issues, be it budget, personnel or techniques?

A CM department, if working well, should be on the leading edge of sample management, be it solid or liquid delivery. The group should be on top of new technologies and formats and provide guidance to the screening groups. If the CM teams waited for the screening groups to implement a new format, or develop a lower volume assay, then the team would be less effective and become a bottleneck to the process. The compound groups need to shake off the distaste of being considered a manufacturing unit and snap into reality. The compound teams are a customer-driven unit, who look at the big picture and try to anticipate the trends of screening, without losing focus on the day-to-day operation. A group can do this if they merge into discovery and become part of the on-going project teams.

How valuable is the quality of your compound collection? Being proactive and taking measures to ensure the quality and integrity of the collection increases the value of the product. Being reactive to the problems such as QC or data management will more than likely seed the doubt of the quality of the collection and the skill set of the employees who manage the inventory.

I personally have come to realize the value of process management and the impact it has on the CM team. Process reviews have improved the turn-around time, the quality and quantity of the products dispensed as well as heightened morale. The price of sitting down with a team of professionals with automation, information, process and project management skills and mapping out the workflow of the various operations of the group is invaluable. The movement of instrumentation closer to the compound stores, the flow of data from inventory systems to robots, even making just the slightest adjustment to the employee's hours can enhance the flow of samples.

The review is a team effort, realizing that everyone's input is required to optimize throughput. So often the customers drive the operation and the employees at times feel they are moving along a path, but do not have the opportunity to take an alternative route, because of business demands. Process management does not stop within the sample groups; they must extend the reviews into all their customers' areas. The knowledge of how the screens function and what manipulations the scientists go through after they receive plates from CM can provide another view of how an impact can be made.

Think about what your CM group has done for you. Remember they are professionals, with scientific experiences and challenges just as complex as yours, but with a skill set in sample, inventory and process management. They work as a team to provide products of high quality, while continuing to look for new technologies, enhance work processes and improve customer satisfaction. CM has 'stepped' out of the box and adopted practices, which are just now moving into the screening facilities.

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