

THE DEMAND FOR WELL-QUALIFIED PERSONNEL IN THE CELL AND GENE THERAPY INDUSTRY



Kadeja Johnson

Editorial Executive, Phacilitate

At Advanced Therapies Week 2024, the Association for the Advancement of Blood & Biotherapies (AABB) invited industry leaders to convene for a roundtable to discuss ‘The Need for Well-Qualified Personnel.’

The roundtable discussion, moderated by Jeff Wren, Vice President, Biotherapies at AABB, and Wanxing Cui, MD, PhD, CABP(H), Director of Cell Therapy Manufacturing Facility at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital, provoked enlightening conversations about the challenges, shared concerns, and collective commitment to drive the evolution of qualifications within the cell and gene therapy industry. For this article, we summarize the insights, solutions and collaborative initiatives paving

the way for a well-qualified and adaptive workforce.

The roundtable participants contributed unique perspectives, representing a wealth of experience in diverse roles industry-wide, from operational and sales management to clinical support and development. Together, they explored shared concerns about the effectiveness of current approaches and unanimously called for transformative changes in the industry, particularly regarding the qualifications of personnel in the workforce.

Speaking on the importance of the topic up for discussion, Wren explained in a follow-up conversation that there is widespread recognition for a qualification applicable

across the industry. “Whether working in the US or globally, the industry is at a point where we’re going to see a crunch around personnel,” he said. “For our therapies to be successful, we must make sure that everyone who touches on the development and delivery of these therapies is qualified and understands the complexities around how they are created.”

How Do We Define a Well-Qualified Individual?

The group first considered the question of defining a ‘well-qualified’ individual. All participants agreed on the significance of workforce

development programs and industry-specific credentials as indicators of competence in the cell and gene therapy space. Resumes alone, especially from those with a biological background, were deemed insufficient in representing the specific skill sets required for advanced therapies, thus highlighting workforce challenges.

Considering factors such as educational background, work experience, and an understanding of the unique challenges of cell and gene therapy, defining a well-qualified workforce became a focal point. The discussion raised questions about bringing in underqualified individuals and its potential impact on business operations. The group emphasized the rapidly growing pace of the industry and the need for effective training programs.

Implementing Standardized Training Programs, Catering to Complex Workflows & Processes

Insights into training programs revealed the industry's complexities, emphasizing the importance of practical training and hands-on experience to build a workforce ready to tackle the challenges of our sector. The group stressed the significance of a diverse workforce, recognizing the value of

individuals transitioning in from related industries.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of accreditation and credentialing in standardizing training programs. The focus on practical skills, continued education and upskilling underscored the commitment to adapting to industry innovations. Ideas for collaborations across industry associations and fostering a globally competent workforce enriched the dialogue. The conversation extended to collaborations with committees like the International Society for Cell & Gene Therapy (ISCT) proposing joint initiatives and potential partnerships with other organizations.

As the roundtable explored industry exposure, workforce qualification and challenges in academic versus commercial training, the group acknowledged the necessity of involving senior members to mentor less experienced individuals. The prospect of certification programs and licensure processes added layers to the narrative, emphasizing the commitment to developing and delivering education in the cell therapy space.

Looking Ahead, and Considering Outcomes

In summarizing the key takeaways and learnings from the session, Wren noted there is agreement on some ways to move the field forward.

“First, there was a resounding confirmation that there is a need to ensure leaders in the cell and gene therapy field are well-versed in all aspects of the biotherapies ecosystem,” he said. “This extends beyond their specific areas of expertise. Second, the current reliance on education and experience as proxies for personnel qualification is not ideal, given the lack of a specific education path or set of experiences that guarantee suitability for a role in the development of biotherapies. Third, it was encouraging to learn that both major academic medical centers and commercial therapy developers, regardless of size, are willing to invest in establishing a highly qualified personnel base for the industry.”

Wren highlighted [AABB's Certified Advanced Biotherapies Professional credential, known as CABP](#), as a potential solution to standardize qualifications in the industry. One member raised the point that public awareness of cell and gene therapies is increasing and there is a need to improve the recognition of credentials that help identify well-qualified personnel and offer programs that allow individuals to gain those qualifications.

In conclusion, the roundtable provided an insightful exploration of the landscape surrounding the skills and expertise demanded by the cell and gene therapy industry. Fueled by the perspectives

of a diverse group, the conversation revealed a collective commitment to address challenges, foster a well-qualified workforce, and embrace collaborative initiatives for the advancement of the industry. With credentialing opportunities on the horizon, there is hope for

a pathway to standardized training programs, leading to an adequately recognized and reliable workforce of the future.