

**Article:**

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The 2024 PhD Board-Certified Clinical Chemist Compensation Survey.
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Guest: Dr. Jaime Noguez from Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine and University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center in Cleveland, Ohio.

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

Doctoral clinical laboratory professionals are essential to healthcare. They develop diagnostic tests, interpret complex test results, and promote high-quality laboratory testing for optimal patient care. Despite their critical contributions, there is a lack of detailed and up-to-date compensation data specific to this credentialed group. While national reports from academic medical organizations may provide general salary benchmarks for PhD faculty, they often fail to distinguish between board-certified and non-certified professionals, leaving a gap in data that's vital for salary negotiations, workforce planning, and career development in clinical chemistry.

The July 2025 issue of *JALM* features a special report describing the findings of the 2024 PhD Board-Certified Clinical Chemist Compensation Survey. The survey was conducted by ADLM's Society for Young Clinical Laboratorians, known as SYCL, and was designed to capture salary and benefits data for board-certified clinical chemists working in the United States and Canada.

The results of the survey are presented for ADLM and SYCL members to make informed decisions while conducting job searches. Today, we're joined by the article's corresponding author, Dr. Jaime Noguez. Dr. Noguez is an Associate Professor of Pathology at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. She is a board-certified clinical chemist and currently serves as the Section Head of Clinical Chemistry, Immunology, and Biochemical Genetics at University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center as well as the Medical Director of Chemistry and Toxicology.

Welcome, Dr. Noguez. This is the fifth edition of the clinical chemist compensation survey. Why does ADLM'S SYCL Core Committee conduct these surveys?

Jaime Noguez: Thanks for having me on the podcast and great question. So SYCL conducts these compensation surveys to provide transparent up-to-date benchmarking data that helps clinical chemists understand their market value, helps them to advocate for equitable compensation, and helps them to make informed career decisions. We believe that these surveys, they're essential for not only promoting workplace retention but also addressing pay disparities and supporting professional growth within the larger laboratory community.

Randy Kaye: Well, that makes sense. So what stood out to you most from the 2024 survey results compared to prior years?

Jaime Noguez: Well, there were several things that stood out. One of them was the continued upward trend in compensation, which we found insightful, especially that we observed a 20% increase in median salaries since 2021 for ABCC board-certified PhD clinical chemists and that increase slightly outpaces inflation and it suggests to us a growing recognition of the value that these professionals bring to healthcare. We also saw the total number of survey respondents increased by 40% from the prior survey and we noted an increased use of the survey by respondents during their salary negotiation. So, we believe that that speaks to influence of the survey and underscores the importance of continuing to conduct it.

Randy Kaye: Well, the report demonstrates that only 60% of the respondents actually negotiated their starting salary. So why do you think negotiation is still such a barrier especially in this highly credentialed field?

Jaime Noguez: Well, it likely reflects a mix of factors including lack of transparency around norms, fear of losing out on an offer, or even cultural expectations, particularly for early career professionals. It's surprising though because what we found is that when people did negotiate, over half actually received an increase. So there's clearly opportunity there, but the comfort level with those conversations just isn't universal yet. We envision that these compensation surveys will serve as a tool for advocacy by empowering individuals with data, especially these early career professionals. It also gives employers a benchmark for fair and competitive compensation so ideally, we believe it fosters more transparent conversations around value and growth and equity.

Randy Kaye: All right, thank you. I think that's common over many fields actually to not say what we earn or negotiate starting salary, so the survey is helping. Now, just over half of the respondents indicated that they have been with their employer for more than six years. So what do you think this says about job satisfaction or stability in this field?

- Jaime Noguez: Well, it suggests that clinical chemistry can offer a high degree of career stability. There are many professionals that find long-term roles, particularly in either academic or healthcare systems where tenure or institutional investment is pretty common. But this longevity also raises questions about salary growth over time, which is something that we investigated with this previous survey. So, despite the increase that we observed in the median total compensations for new clinical chemists entering the field, we also noted that the majority of respondents reported annual salary increases of only 1 to 3% from their current employer. And so this can raise a bit of concern about the potential for wage compression. If institutions are really just relying solely on the survey data for setting salaries for new hires, but then not going back and periodically reassessing the competitiveness of the compensation for employees that have been at their company for a long time.
- Randye Kaye: Were there any limitations in the current survey and if so, how might they be addressed in the next round?
- Jaime Noguez: Well, our main challenge for the survey was the response rate for certain subgroups. Particularly MD PhD holders, Canadian respondents, and those that are certified by boards other than the American Board of Clinical Chemistry, and that really limited our ability to do more granular analysis. So the bulk of the analysis was performed on data for clinical chemists in the United States that are certified by the American Board of Clinical Chemistry. And so, future surveys, we hope to have more respondents and to be able to do targeted outreach in order to increase that participation among those groups and to continue to enhance the richness of our data. And as I mentioned previously, the number of respondents did increase by 40% since the previous survey so I think that that shows that we're taking steps in the right direction.
- Randye Kaye: Yeah, it sounds like it. Dr. Noguez, do you see opportunities to align this survey with related fields that have doctoral laboratory professionals such as microbiology and genomics to get a more complete picture of the laboratory workforce?
- Jaime Noguez: Definitely. I think that many of the issues we face such as compensation gaps, retention, institutional support, these are all shared across the clinical disciplines and so harmonized efforts could potentially provide a broader view of the value and then the challenges for doctoral-level laboratorians. I also think that we're moving in the right direction as collaboration grows between societies like the Association for Diagnostics & Laboratory Medicine, the American Society for Microbiology, and the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics.

- Randye Kaye: Thank you. So one final question. For someone in the field of clinical chemistry, what would you say is the bottom line? What should they take away from this report?
- Jaime Noguez: Well, I would love that they take away that this is a viable and rewarding career path, both intellectually and financially, that board certification adds significant value, and that advocating for fair compensation is not just acceptable, it's essential. So use the data, ask the questions, and really don't be afraid to negotiate.
- Randye Kaye: Thank you so much for joining us today.
- Jaime Noguez: Thank you.
- Randye Kaye: That was Dr. Jaime Noguez from Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, describing the *JALM* article, "The 2024 PhD Board-Certified 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.