Aiming to ease lab labor, cost, TAT pressures

Anne Ford

The traditional military strategists’ adage, “Know your enemy,” is advice that laboratory equipment manufacturers have been following for a long time. The enemy, being in this case, the laboratory labor shortage trend, which Grant Howes, director of strategic marketing for Beckman Coulter’s cellular analysis business group, describes as a “now familiar, but ever increasing” dynamic that will “only intensify.” While knowing this particular enemy hasn’t been enough to vanquish it entirely, manufacturers continue to introduce instruments designed to ease the labor shortage’s effects on laboratories. Two of the vendors in this month’s instrumentation survey, Beckman Coulter and Sysmex America, share their perspectives on this and other trends in the hematology analyzer marketplace.

Sysmex America, reports Ron Walczak, director of marketing communications and research, has just received FDA clearance for its XE-5000 hematology analyzer, which the company expects to be in the market by the end of the year and which will feature a body fluid specific mode. “This system will fit in very well with Sysmex’s current hematology product portfolio, consisting of innovative fluorescent flow technology, high throughput, and highly reliable platforms,” Walczak says. It’s part of the company’s strategy to “provide rapid, accurate clinical information to the clinician who requires little or no additional technical intervention. In other words, the lab wants correct results the first time so they can report them faster to the clinician.” In addition, “high reliability, more clinically relevant information, and standardized testing platforms to meet the needs of laboratories of various volumes and quality results are all very important right now.” And in the future? “Continued increased reliability and less hands-on instrument technology” will be key.

Beckman Coulter plans to launch a new hematology analyzer in 2008, which follows on the heels of the Coulter LH 780 hematology series, introduced in late 2006. Among that series’ features: whole blood count. Linear range of 400-000,000; automated enumeration of NRBCs; the ability to read even low-print-quality bar-code labels; an RDW-SD parameter; and the ability to obtain an exponentially weighted moving average of CBC, five-part differential, and NRBC, as well as reticulocyte parameters.

“When we look at the near-term future for hematology,” Howes says, “workloads and pressures for shorter turnaround times will continue to increase, as will the pressure to lower costs. That’s why Beckman Coulter’s new products are being designed to provide the solutions labs can use to step up to this new level of challenges.”

Finally, Howes’ colleague Alan Burton, director of marketing for Beckman Coulter’s cellular analysis business group, places great importance on the value of integrated platforms. “Many of our customers know the benefits of integrated platforms,” he says, “and will be happy to know that the range of hematology, chemistry, immunoassay, molecular diagnostics, and flow cytometry platforms made by one manufacturer, as well as reagents, data management, and service, is a trend that promises to continue and grow—especially since this integration addresses so many of the productivity and cost control issues labs face.”

CAP TODAY’s survey of hematology analyzers includes systems not only from Beckman Coulter and Sysmex America but Abbott Hematology, Siemens Medical Solutions Diagnostics, and Horiba ABX Diagnostics. Vendors supplied the information listed on this and the following pages. Readers interested in a particular analyzer should confirm it has the stated features and capabilities.