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OF HEALTHCARE EXCELLENCE

Collaborations for healthcare excellence: An interview with two clinical leaders in Croatia

Healthcare excellence is happening all over the world. Modern Healthcare Custom Media caught up with two clinical leaders in Croatia—**Prof. Dražen Huić, MD, PhD, head of the department of nuclear medicine and radiation protection at University Hospital Centre Zagreb, and Prof. Goran Krstajić, MD, PhD, FESC, FEHRA, director of the Institute of Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation in Zagreb**—who are leading transformational change within their respective specialties. In these interviews, Huić and Krstajić discussed exciting new innovations in nuclear medicine and cardiology, while also commenting on how laboratory medicine helps make many of their achievements possible.

How do you collaborate with the laboratory in your work as a nuclear medicine specialist?

PROF. DRAŽEN HUIĆ: In my department, we treat patients with thyroid cancer and other thyroid diseases. It's invaluable to our patients that we work closely with the laboratory department because we get test results instantly, allowing patients to understand their disease state more readily and discuss next steps in their care quicker. Collaboration with the laboratory department is essential, because together we can find novel treatments for our patients, leading to better outcomes.

As president of the Croatian Society of Nuclear Medicine, what advances do you expect in the profession and how will laboratory medicine play a role?

DH: The future of nuclear medicine focuses on collaborating closely with laboratory professionals on the latest diagnostic advancements. In the whole world as well as in Croatia, nuclear medicine is moving to the molecular level, using positron emission tomography-computed tomography (PET/CT) diagnostics. Another area where



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we're seeing advances is therapy that uses radioactive substances. In nuclear medicine, this approach is called "theranostics." This is the term used to describe the combination of using one radioactive drug to diagnose and a second radioactive drug to treat the tumor and possible metastases. Laboratory results are critical to measuring the efficacy of this treatment, as they allow us to determine whether a tumor is still metabolically active.

The UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence™ award program recognizes healthcare teams across the globe that collaborate to achieve measurably better outcomes. Why is it important for teams to be acknowledged for their success?

DH: It is a very good way to be recognized outside of your local environment. It's important for healthcare teams to see what others are doing, so that they can be motivated to achieve similar improvements. When we encourage innovation across the world, we can have a significant, positive impact on patient care. Teams should be encouraged to apply for recognition of their hard work through programs such as UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence.

What opportunities exist for laboratory medicine to advance cardiovascular care?

PROF. GORAN KRSTAJIĆ: Subclinical cardiac dysfunction is a key area where laboratory insights can support improvements in care. There is a wide array of novel biomarkers with various purposes in the diagnosis and prognostication of patients with subclinical cardiac dysfunction, and that can lead clinicians to question which are most reliable. Identifying key mediators of cardiovascular disease, such as inflammation, may offer valuable insight into the prediction of cardiovascular disease and allow the laboratory to support clinicians in these important clinical decisions.

You are a board member of the Croatian Heart House Foundation, which is advancing cardiac care in your country. How does the laboratory influence this important work?

GK: Recently, we started a three-year project called "Women and Heart," which addresses early screening of cardiovascular disease



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in women 45 years and older. Our goal is to identify at-risk women—because women represent the majority of deaths from cardiovascular disease in Croatia—and then intervene earlier. The project relies on laboratory medicine for its successful execution, as it is based on laboratory analysis of biomarkers of cardiovascular diseases, primarily high-sensitivity Troponin (hs-cTn). So far, 650 women have been involved in the project, which has met our expectations and purpose—a significant number of participants have findings that require further diagnostic processing.

You're a valued advocate of the UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence award. Why should healthcare teams apply for this program?

GK: The UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence program recognizes practice excellence that leads to measurable results, not only for the patient but for the whole health system, and encourages others to take a similar path. Such an exchange of knowledge, experience and practice is invaluable for achieving excellence.

Applications for the 2021 awards open August 1st. Prepare now at UnivantsHCE.com.



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