

UNIFY FOR SOMETHING GREATER. HEALTHCARE EXCELLENCE AWAITS.



Don't underestimate the value of the clinical laboratory

The clinical laboratory is essential in enabling proactive, cost-effective interventions. We discussed this topic and the evolving mission of clinical laboratories with Khosrow Shotorbani, president and executive director of the Project Santa Fe Foundation, which is focused on the future of laboratory medicine while spearheading the Clinical Lab 2.0 movement.

What is the state of laboratory medicine today?

The COVID-19 pandemic has driven positive awareness about the laboratory, helping society at-large to understand the role of diagnostics in healthcare. We have to harness this momentum to further the laboratory's influence on care.

Healthcare is at a strategic inflection point, in part due to shifts in physician employment and industry consolidation. Health systems must recognize the value of laboratory data for population health and value-based agreements. When the competencies of laboratory medicine and its organizational assets are retained, preserved and harnessed, the clinical laboratory becomes a leader in designing new care models for clinical intervention, prevention and cost avoidance. The time is now to reimagine the model for the clinical laboratory and its influence on outcomes.

What do you see as the role of the laboratory in value-based agreements, which are growing in popularity?

The laboratory's role in these programs is significant, as we move from sick care to well care. I believe that the laboratory is the catalyst in harnessing value that serves the objectives of population health and the management of chronic conditions. The laboratory gives us a feedback loop to say, "How did we do it? What were the results of our interventions?" and that helps us replicate high-quality care. The laboratory can also help us see a more longitudinal view of health, helping us better predict when chronically ill patients may be transitioning to a more severe stage of illness.

Patients are more educated than ever about the clinical laboratory. How can laboratory data be harnessed to engage patients and improve population health?

If we cannot impact patient behavior, we will not be able to solve healthcare's biggest issues. We need to improve how patients receive diagnostic information, because people take actions when they're informed. If we can apply artificial intelligence and machine learning to laboratory results and translate them into much simpler terms that



patients can understand, we may be able to better drive preventive behaviors.

The power of the clinical laboratory does not end when we release a result—rather, that's where it begins. We should be creating processes based on the behavior of patients that automatically sets interventions in motion.

How will the shift of more visits to virtual care change how laboratories serve outpatients? How should leaders structure their organizations to effectively respond to this change?

Telemedicine is a steppingstone to healthcare consumerism because it meets the consumer where they are, but it's not necessarily an improvement upon in-person care. It's still quite reactionary: the patient is still accessing care based on symptoms and the provider is responding with interventions. We're still running laboratory tests after a patient says they're sick.

In the next chapter for laboratory medicine, we'll change that dynamic, shifting the laboratory from a reactive service to one that triggers care. It's our vision to collect and analyze longitudinal data, and develop processes around health maintenance, so that we can use technology to identify high-risk patients early and prompt caregivers to reach out to them and act proactively, before they get sick. That approach would be "Clinical Lab 2.0."

You're an advocate for the UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence™ awards. Why should healthcare innovators apply for this prestigious recognition?

The program calls for healthcare teams to "Unify for something greater." This underscores the importance of partnership. Thus, UNIVANTS encourages laboratory leaders to lock arms with clinical colleagues who are focused on a common vision and common challenges. I also greatly appreciate the program's focus on measurably better outcomes, as it highlights the predictive properties of the laboratory that make this possible. UNIVANTS has elevated the role of the clinical lab in improving outcomes, reducing clinical risk and ultimately reducing the total cost of delivery.

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