

■ Lab Medicine: Diamonds, Not Coal

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Diamonds are associated with strength, happiness, and health, created through intense pressure that transforms an unremarkable pebble to a valued gem. Much like diamonds, laboratory medicine is under transformational pressure to provide value in ways it never has before and to exceed expectations. With impressive agility, collaboration, and innovation, many laboratorians around the globe are rising to the occasion, providing data and insights that improve patient wellness, enhance safety, mitigate costs, and more. Recognition and amplification of these efforts and outcomes are crucial steps in reinforcing the power of laboratory medicine as a “valued gem” within healthcare.

The UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence award program has long recognized the value of laboratory medicine. The program was created to inspire, amplify, and celebrate integrated clinical care teams who have achieved measurably better healthcare, fueled by laboratory medicine. Three top winning teams, teams of distinction and/or achievement, are selected each year with rigorous scoring from the International Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (IFCC), Association for Diagnostics & Laboratory Medicine (ADLM), EHMA (European Health Management Association), Modern Healthcare, Health Information and Management

Systems Society (HIMSS), National Association of Healthcare Quality (NAHQ), and the Institute of Health Economics (IHE). The award program, while funded by Abbott, is agnostic to products and platforms, free to apply, and accessible to over 175 countries.

Now in its fifth year of judge-identified winners, UNIVANTS has reached a “diamond” milestone with over 75 laboratory-enabled best practices recognized to date. The most recent award recipients were recognized this July 2024, with more details in Fig. 1, as well as through the program website at www.UnivantsHCE.com. All 12 of these diverse, new initiatives, much like those previously documented (1–4), have strategically generated measurable benefits for patients, payors, clinicians, and health system/administrations through unified teams and avant-garde thinking (thus, comprising the honored title of UNIVANTS). Notably, each of these best practices, whether through new initiatives for screening, revamping old initiatives to improve care delivery and increase health equity, implementation of risk prediction and wellness programs, and more, share key learnings and insights into the brilliant treasure trove of improved health outcomes.

Among the crown jewels are integrated clinical care initiatives that address global disease

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UNIVANTS OF HEALTHCARE EXCELLENCE TOP ELITE WINNERS		
GetCheckedOnline: Better access to testing for sexually-transmitted and blood-borne infections – British Columbia Centre for Disease Control, Canada	Devon Haag Meghan McLennan Garth Graham	Mark Gilbert Susie van der Valk
Early detection of metabolic-dysfunction associated steatotic liver disease using FIB-4 – Premier Integrated Labs Sdn Bhd, Malaysia	Yoke Lee Low Hareeff Muhammed	Leslie Charles Lai Chin Loy Mun Yee, Evonne Kong
Improved management of patients with high LDL-C through electronic health record-directed algorithms for guideline-concordant high-intensity statin prescribing – Kaiser Permanente Southern California, United States	Matthew Mefford Michael Kanter Ronald Scott	Kristi Reynolds Tracy Imley
UNIVANTS OF HEALTHCARE EXCELLENCE RECOGNITION OF DISTINCTION		
Improving equity in maternal and newborn outcomes by eliminating disparities in maternal drug screening – Washington University School of Medicine, Barnes-Jewish Hospital, and St. Louis Children’s Hospital, United States	Vahid Azimi Jeannie Kelly Lauren Nacke	Noor Riaz Stephen Roper
Improving access to health services in vulnerable communities affected by war – Esculab, Ukraine	Viktoriia Honcharenko Anna Konyk Olena Yanchinska	Liudmyla Kostyuk Iryna Mandzyuk
Improved patient outcomes facilitated by C-peptide testing, enabling reclassification and therapeutic changes for patients with diabetes – University Hospital of Wales, Wales	Arshiya Tabasum Colin Dayan Rowan Hellier	Carol Evans Julia Johansson Evans
UNIVANTS OF HEALTHCARE EXCELLENCE RECOGNITION OF ACHIEVEMENT		
Reducing unnecessary CT scans in the emergency department with new mild head injury assessment pathway – Klinikum Lüneburg, Germany	Felix Brüning-Wolter Meike Schrader Nicola Wolff	Thomas Rodt Jörg Cramer
The Kansas Two-Step: Simplifying the diagnosis of clostridioides difficile at an academic medical center – The University of Kansas Health System, United States	Matthew Loeb Matt Humphrey Sarah Mester	Matt Shoemaker Maggie Reavis
No time to lose with lives on the line - Maximizing efficiency in the lab to save more lives through organ donation – Southwest Transplant Alliance, United States	Selena Warden Doug Butler Sean Forquer	Reid Freeman Cristina Solomon
The Women and Heart Program - Empowering women’s health through early identification and prevention of coronary risk – Institute for Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation, Croatia	Andrea Snagić Goran Krstajić	Ante Miljak Sonja Frančula-Zaninović
Reducing unnecessary admissions associated with pediatric mononucleosis via implementation of EBV IgM testing in the emergency department – Emergency Clinical County Hospital Targu Mures, Romania	Oana Roxana Oprea Karoly Vecsei Florina Floristeanu	Lucia Mezei Dobreanu Minodora
Establishment of a monomer prolactin detection method and specific reference interval to enhance the ability to identify macroprolactinemia – Huashan Hospital Fudan University, China	Ming Guan Yao Hu Hongying Ye	Zhaoyun Zhang Yao Zhao

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Fig. 1. 2024 UNIVANTS of healthcare excellence award winners.

burdens currently on the rise, including sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBI), cardiovascular disease, liver disease, and diabetes. A critical success factor across all 4 includes utilizing laboratory-generated insights and information.

In the case of STBBI, critical success factors specifically related to testing include access to testing

and increasing frequency of testing in high-risk and marginalized populations. The innovative GetCheckedOnline program, led by the British Columbia Center for Disease Control (BC CDC), addresses these gaps with anonymized access, online registration, timely testing, and subsequent notification, treatment, and follow-through. Standout outcomes included reduced stigma,

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improved testing cadence, and a 10-fold improvement in health system resource utilization (from 300 to 3000 visits/months).

The innovative SureNet program (5) also maximizes resource utilization, in addition to improving statin prescription ordering, fills, and laboratory test completions in patients with very high low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C). Through electronic surveillance, strategic algorithms, and specialized care managers, the SureNet program identifies patients with care gaps and successfully reduces cardiovascular risk through statin-lowered LDL-C.

A final gem among the top 3 winning teams for the 2024 UNIVANTS awards involves early detection of metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD) using Fibrosis-4 (FIB-4). Use of innovative algorithms and clinical decision

support have become increasingly more essential for early detection of liver disease. Thus, laboratory medicine is integral within this setting, enabling key outcomes at Premier Integrated Labs of reduced hospital stay and decreased workday absenteeism for patients with suspected MASLD.

These best practices are designs for what can be done, while serving as inspiration for what is possible. While learning from these treasures and doing more in your respective fields, remember that all laboratorians are diamonds with enduring brilliance. Laboratory medicine did and can thrive under pressure, delivering solutions that not only address care gaps, but strengthen relationships, promote happiness, and advance health. With this diamond milestone for UNIVANTS and laboratory medicine, let's celebrate, inspire, and shine together.

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