

Pressing Concerns in the Clinical Laboratory and Potential Impact



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Today's social, economic and political environment is challenged with several pressing concerns for the clinical laboratory that impact healthcare systems, professionals and patients. A brief review of those concerns includes funding and reimbursement, regulation and compliance, workforce shortages, telemedicine and remote diagnostics, data security and privacy, global health and access to testing as well as the political divides on public health responses.

The laboratory has persistently struggled with funding and reimbursement with budget cuts in some areas and reduced reimbursements. Healthcare, including the clinical laboratory must move towards value-based care to improve services, patient outcomes and reduce costs. This can only be accomplished through more efficient and evidence-based practices, often without additional funding.

Laboratory regulations vary globally, however, there is on-going pressure to standardize laboratory testing. Control of laboratory regulations often limits and encumbers these processes. This is only exacerbated by the growing workforce shortages. This shortage is magnified by the aging workforce, insufficient recruitment and challenges in retaining staff.

In addition to staffing, digitization of health information raises concerns about data security and privacy. This is fueled by the increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) in laboratory diagnostics and the growing volume of data. Both digitization and AI are also impacted by the rapid expansion of telemedicine and the regulatory gaps for at-home testing and monitoring of patients.

Lastly, but most certainly not the least of the challenges is the global disparities in testing access. This is even more evident with political decisions that are affecting international relations and trade policies that impact the availability and distribution of diagnostic tests. This may disrupt the global supply chain that could affect public health not only on a daily basis but in critical emergencies such as pandemics.

In order to address these issues, laboratory professionals, policymakers and the public must collaborate to ensure the laboratory services continue to meet the needs of patients, improve health outcomes and remain sustainable. The intersection of the clinical laboratory and healthcare policy is complex and are all influenced by the ever-changing political environment globally. As laboratory professionals we must remain steadfast and committed to quality diagnostic testing for all and continue to support our communities of professionals!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patricia Tille'.

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