

# Why Labs Are Vital

## BIVDA



**L**ab tests can mean the difference between life and death. Hard-hitting as it sounds, lab tests provide patients with the results that can change their life and allow health professionals to diagnose and then treat their conditions.

Laboratory tests are a key component in virtually every health intervention that takes place. The results of these tests provide essential and invaluable information throughout the healthcare process, with tests being used for screening, diagnosis, prognosis and monitoring of patients.

Patient care is obviously the main priority, but when used appropriately, this information can improve the quality of healthcare delivery whilst at the same time improving efficiency within the system. Reduced hospital stays, avoidance of unnecessary or incorrect treatment and improved management of patient health can all reduce costs.

This also falls in line with the Government's agenda to improve patient choice. The launch of the new flagship website, NHS Choices,

this summer reflects the fact that patients want choice when it comes to receiving healthcare in the same way that they want choice in any service they use.

The increasing availability of tests that were once only available by taking a trip to the hospital but are now available as self-monitoring tests demonstrates that people are able to

take more control over their own health. These tests are helping many people with long term chronic disease to manage their illnesses in the community giving them independence and improved quality of life without having to spend travelling to and from hospital and sitting in busy waiting rooms.

It is thanks to advances in technology that many tests are now being performed outside of a laboratory setting and this is providing more timely results at the point where clinical decisions are being taken. However, these advances depend on investment and innovation and without funding, further progress is being restricted.

Cost constraint has been defined as the primary driver of healthcare policy for a long time. A number of reasons have been identified as being behind the current under utilisation of diagnostic information including administrative complexity, physicians' knowledge level, issues with funding, the time delay in implementation of new tests or technologies and the lack of economic evidence for clinical utility.

As a result of all these factors, the spending per year on laboratory medicine remains lower than two percent of the total healthcare expenditure in Europe. In the United Kingdom spending is approximately €11 per capita, less than half that in Germany, France, Spain or Italy.

Within diagnostics, Britain can clearly be considered as the 'Poor Man of Europe' when it comes to spending. There is a real need to change the perception and understanding of the value of clinical laboratory diagnostic information in healthcare. Clinical laboratory testing and the information it provides is essential to ensure high quality and accessible healthcare is being delivered.

The British In Vitro Diagnostics Association - BIVDA - is committed to raising the awareness of testing in patient pathways and is working in partnership with the Royal College of Pathology, the Association for Clinical Biochemistry and the Association of Clinical Pathologists on a new initiative, 'Labs Are Vital', to increase the awareness of the pathology service and the standing of the laboratory professional. Through the launch of this programme, which includes a UK website, we are encouraging the sharing of best practice and knowledge amongst not only healthcare professionals but the general public so that we can demonstrate to everyone the real difference that diagnostics and testing makes to healthcare in this country.

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