

UNIFY FOR SOMETHING GREATER. HEALTHCARE EXCELLENCE AWAITS.



In celebration of Lab Week, Abbott's Colleen Strain and Tricia Ravalico discuss the vital role of clinical laboratories and the global success of the UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence™ awards, which recognize healthcare teams that have achieved measurably better outcomes through laboratory insights.

April 18 to 24 is Medical Laboratory Professionals Week, an annual celebration of medical laboratory professionals and pathologists. Why is it important to celebrate these individuals and the profession?

COLLEEN STRAIN: Celebrations enable recognition of accomplishments. This is especially important for clinical laboratories, as they are almost always “behind the scenes” and not typically in front of patients. Lab Week is an opportunity to celebrate the unsung heroes in this valued profession.

TRICIA RAVALICO: Laboratorians make a difference in the lives of thousands of patients every day, and yet, the discipline has long been under-recognized for the value it brings to healthcare. With that said, the world is changing, and as more healthcare organizations move towards value-based medicine, the strategic value of the clinical laboratory will not only become better appreciated, but better recognized for its well-founded associations to key performance indicators and transformational patient care.

Speaking of how the world is changing, how has COVID-19 shone a spotlight on laboratory professionals and pathologists?

CS: An obvious immediate positive is that people are now more aware of the value that laboratory medicine provides for decision-making. Lab testing is on the forefront of peoples' minds and is being talked about in ways that had never been done before. On the other side, the pandemic has brought visibility to the reality that not all diseases have diagnostic blood tests nor do all tests have 100% accuracy. Managing



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those challenges as well as running the general operations for thousands of tests across hundreds of different methodologies is a core competency in and of itself.

TR: I think people have also begun to better associate laboratory testing with “health,” or in the case of COVID-19, potential immunity, versus “sick” care. That appreciation is relatively new for the general public but is increasingly common for innovative health systems that are focused on wellness and prevention.

How can administrators empower laboratory professionals to have a significant influence on healthcare transformation?

CS: Two of the most compelling principles of successful clinical care initiatives are proactivity and collaboration. Teams with UNIVANTS recognition tend to have transformational outcomes when different disciplines work together to find novel solutions to everyday problems. It is a mindset change to appreciate that laboratories are not cost centers, but rather, a vital patient-centric discipline with skilled and strategic professionals focused on quality, lean processes and elevating patient care.

TR: An unfortunate reality is that laboratory leaders tend not to have that “seat at the table” where complex challenges are discussed, and multi-disciplinary solutions are devised. Healthcare communities with engaged and empowered multi-disciplinary teams will succeed.

Can you tell us about the UNIVANTS of Healthcare Excellence™ award—how it came to be, and what you're proud of as it relates to this program?

TR: The UNIVANTS program began over 3 years ago with the

primary goal of recognizing integrated clinical care teams that have achieved measurable success. By amplifying best practices, we could inspire more best practices, learn from one another and advance patient care across the globe.

CS: One of the proudest metrics has been the program's reach. We now have nearly 150 countries actively visiting the website and engaged in healthcare excellence. We also have valued advocates and prestigious program partners. It has been a sincere joy to be a part of this elite program and to celebrate brilliant teams that have changed healthcare for the better in their regions and beyond.

UNIVANTS is a global award program, engaging healthcare teams from emerging and established markets. What message do you have for Modern Healthcare's largely U.S.-based readership?

CS: My biggest message to healthcare leaders is to apply to the program, because sharing best practices elevates healthcare. There has been a surprising underrepresentation of nominated healthcare best practices from the United States, even though we would expect to see overrepresentation.

TR: Sometimes teams don't make time to measure their achievements. We've updated the UNIVANTS application guide this year with best practice advice from previous years in order to help with the application process for those who want this guidance. Of course, we continue to have email support and excellent tools available on the program website to help applicants be as successful as possible.

In a recent article in the Journal of the International Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine, you both wrote that healthcare professionals carry the burden of life and death decisions every day, and therefore are the "oxygen" to millions of patients in need." Can you elaborate?

CS: We don't think about breathing, we just do it, and take it for granted every day. The same can be said for laboratory insights and the data provided by the clinical laboratory. Healthcare cannot survive without the contributions of the clinical laboratory.

TR: Our healthcare pledge is relevant as we celebrate laboratory medicine. It's our hope that everyone who has a passion for healthcare reads it and embodies it in their work.

PLEDGE FOR HEALTHCARE EXCELLENCE

“From this day forward, for better (and not worse), in sickness and in health, for patients and the community, for unborn babies to the elderly, to save and to heal, I commit to healthcare excellence all the days of my life. To be inclusive and innovative, and being open and strategic; all while maximizing the value of laboratory medicine until death do us part.”

What areas of opportunity are prime for innovation for the 2021 UNIVANTS winners? What types of submissions do you anticipate receiving?

CS: I am hopeful that we will see best practices in areas that have never been done before. As our recent paper highlights, there are opportunities for recognized best practices in fertility, respiratory disease and neurology.

TR: Clinical algorithms are becoming even more essential for preventative care, so I hope to see strategic solutions in that area across all fields of medicine. With that said, sometimes even the simplest initiatives in any area can become the most valued and reproducible, so I guess we'll just need to wait until August 1st when best practices start coming in!

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



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