Laboratorians and Their Patients: The Impact of Direct Access to Laboratory Test Results on Medical Laboratory Professionals' Attitudes and Practices

LETYCIA NUÑEZ-ARGOTE, JOANNA VEAZEY BROOKS

ABSTRACT

PROBLEM: Technology and legislation have changed the way patients access health care information through the electronic health record. This study aims to gather information about medical laboratory professionals' (MLPs') perspectives regarding patients having direct access to laboratory test results (DALTR) via online web portals.

METHODS: Audio-recorded semistructured interviews with MLPs were conducted ($n = 15$). The interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed iteratively based on grounded theory to identify patterns and themes. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participant demographics.

RESULTS: All MLPs say that DALTR can help patients understand their care. There was consistent disagreement as to which laboratory tests are best suited for DALTR by patients. Only a few MLPs were sure they could recommend resources for patients to navigate portals and use test results on their own. All MLPs were of the opinion that a clinician must be the intermediary between patients and their test results. MLPs do not think they have a role in communicating results to patients, but a few acknowledged that additional training and experience can make laboratorians adept at helping patients understand laboratory-generated information.

CONCLUSIONS: All MLPs agreed that providing results to patients online through web portals is necessary, but they caution that, without proper knowledge and context, laboratory test information can be misconstrued. There were mixed views about how laboratorians should participate in the DALTR process. This pilot study captures important information about practice-specific concerns that have emerged with technological advances and policy changes that affect laboratory test reporting through patient web portals.

ABBREVIATIONS: DALTR - direct access to laboratory test results, MLP - medical laboratory professional.

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QUESTIONS

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*Letycia Nuñez-Argote, Joanna Veazey Brooks

The University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas City, KS

Question 1: Which characteristics of laboratory professionals and their environment most distinctly divided their individual opinions about patient access to laboratory test results online?

A. Age and healthcare setting where they work

B. Certification status and area of the clinical laboratory where they work

C. Healthcare setting where they work and connectivity of laboratory information system to patient portal

D. Certification status and type of health care setting where they work

Question 2: What was the most common opinion given by laboratory professionals when asked about increasing the visibility of the laboratory through patient access to laboratory test results online?

A. They said it would be a good thing if patients can see the tests because it might lead them to think about who did the tests.

B. They mostly said patients do not know laboratory workers exist, and that more visibility will only come from advocacy efforts.

C. They were worried that increased visibility of laboratorians would lead to increased liability and lawsuits when things go wrong.

D. They think that, to gain visibility, laboratorians need to put themselves in front of patients and talk to them about what people in the laboratory do.

***Letycia Nuñez-Argote**, The University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas City, Kansas*

***Joanna Veazey Brooks**, The University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas City, Kansas*

***Address for Correspondence: Letycia Nuñez-Argote**, The University of Kansas Medical Center, Kansas City, Kansas, lnunezargote@kumc.edu*

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