

Lab Tests Online Meeting in Rome Charts Further European Expansion

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The economic crisis has ushered in an era of austerity in virtually every aspect of contemporary society. Needless to say, healthcare has hardly been spared from the cuts by means of public spending and national budgets. Yet to ensure sound healthcare expenditure, wise investment will provide concepts, tools, techniques and strategies rather than random or haphazard cuts to the future of healthcare. Online tools to provide health literacy have thus gained importance as they provide patients with accurate and reliable information that help better understand disease prevention, monitoring and treatment. In turn, this carries the potential of reducing the strain of healthcare costs—on both individuals and the state—throughout the EU, as higher awareness can lead to the reduction of lifestyle-related diseases and preventable complications.

Responding to the demand for reliable diagnostic information

The Lab Tests Online initiative has become one such valuable tool for the promotion of health literacy in the context of laboratory testing. As a patient-centric, peer-reviewed, and noncommercial platform, it is the premiere resource for patients seeking to obtain information on screening, health conditions, and the diagnostic tests that they may require. It also provides news and research articles related to laboratories, how they work, what they do, and what impact they have on patient outcomes.

Advancing traditional doctor-patient communications

The website, which was initially launched in the United States in 2001 by the American Association for Clinical Chemistry (AACC), has since grown into a communication success. It has branched out to include local information for 16 countries and in 13 languages in order to help answer the call of doctors, patients and their families of facilitating the localization of information on laboratory testing. All of the national Lab Tests Online websites are certified by the Health on the Net Foundation (HON)—an international nonprofit organization working to promote the publication of useful health information online and providing guidelines to ensure reliability.

Improving health through health literacy

The Lab Tests Online sites supply the public with an ethical service by giving them clear and reliable informa-



Photo: Representatives from 12 EU countries, during the last LTO ICC meeting in Rome.

tion to facilitate understanding of testing procedures. When patients have an awareness of what tests are used for and how they work, they are more likely to ask the “right” questions of their doctors and express specific concerns, factors that the medical community considers to be conducive to correct diagnosis and treatment. The reviews, recommendations, and awards that the websites receive have made it clear that the Lab Tests Online project is filling a niche that patients appreciate and offers information that has long been sought after—all in one place.

Bringing together cross-border interactions

Beyond the patient empowerment that the initiative grants to users, it also performs a service to patients seeking medical services beyond their home country, but in their mother tongue. Lab Tests Online/Spain, for instance, has become a pillar for Spanish-speakers living abroad when they are in need of explanations or guidance regarding their healthcare. This is possible thanks to the overlap between some countries in the types of tests that they provide. Specifically, a Spaniard living in Romania is getting a test that is also available in Spain; she can attain more information in her mother tongue through Lab Tests Online. The website's reliability with users even earned it the Web Médica Acreditata, awarded by the Medical Association of Barcelona, in recognition of the website's adherence to their high standards of quality.

During the last LTO ICC meeting that took place in Rome on July 9,

2012, representatives of 12 EU countries held discussions on the EU traffic, the evolution of the Engitel platform, evaluated their national site, and reviewed new guidelines and features in development. As the European

healthcare industry continues to grow more cohesive, the Lab Tests Online initiative will follow suit and provide more opportunities for cross-border interaction that serves both citizens and the healthcare community.

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