

Labcorp: On a mission to improve health for everyone, starting with employees



As a leading global life sciences company, Labcorp's mission is to improve health and improve lives. This includes the lives of the company's nearly 65,000 employees, many on the front lines of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) testing and developing vaccines and therapies.

Last year at Optum Forum, Labcorp received the "Achieving Population Health Management" award, recognizing the success of its Partnership for Health program. Labcorp and Optum share similar missions. So it's no surprise that in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the partnership between the two organizations is more meaningful than ever.

Population health solutions from Optum have helped Labcorp employees improve their health and well-being — and stay more connected in a time of isolation for many. That helps employees focus on their critical work in fighting COVID-19 and day-to-day contributions to guiding patient care through comprehensive clinical laboratory and end-to-end drug development services.

On the forefront of COVID-19 self-testing

Labcorp was among the first to offer testing for COVID-19, and did so only five days after the Food and Drug Administration provided Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). Labcorp also received the first EUA to permit nasal swab specimens to be collected at home and sent to Labcorp for testing.

Dr. Brian Caveney is chief medical officer and president of diagnostics for Labcorp. "Recently we expanded access to our at-home collection kit," he says. "Initially it was available to front-line health care workers and first responders. Now it's available to a broader range of individuals who need testing nationwide."

Enabling a person to collect their own specimen using a nasal swab helps prevent transmission of the virus. It also reduces the demand for personal protective equipment (PPE), since a clinician doesn't have to be involved in the process.

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People, processes, purpose

How were they able to ramp up nationwide testing for COVID-19 so quickly? Dr. Caveney credits his colleagues.

“Our people have been working tirelessly, day and night, to increase testing capacity, roll out multiple testing solutions and provide individuals with a variety of ways to access testing with no upfront, out-of-pocket costs,” he says.

The company’s footprint and infrastructure are also critical in scaling up testing. “Our sophisticated logistics, infrastructure, capacity, IT platforms and the incredible scientists who can develop these new assays very quickly, enabled the ramp up,” says Dr. Caveney.

In the absence of vaccine or therapeutic, identifying cases is the most important way to contain COVID-19, he says. Labcorp considered every step of the diagnostic process, on a global scale.

“We completely diversified our supply chain globally, bringing up multiple platforms that are doing similar PCR analysis on specimens but are doing it on different machinery by different manufacturers,” he says. This helps avoid any bottleneck of supplies — reagents, buffers, etc. — required to process a sample.

They also increased the number of lab sites, which helps reduce the time it takes to transport specimens to the labs. “But it’s also important because if there were an outbreak and a site had to be taken down, volumes wouldn’t be affected drastically,” Dr. Caveney says.

Labcorp has consistently thought of every step in the process and optimized each process to increase total capacity. For example, the company re-engineered a process to produce four times the through-put with the same amount of reagent, which was fully validated through the FDA to produce the same high-quality result.

Labcorp is also using its existing platforms and relationships to quickly ramp up COVID-19 antibody testing. The company has more than 2,000 patient service centers nationwide, and supports hospitals with their lab testing where appropriate.

The self-testing kits also help address the bottleneck created by the lack of physical testing locations. People were and continue to be anxious about going to a clinic to be tested. “By having someone do a self-swab at home, it helps both ways,” says Dr. Caveney. “We get a high-quality result to the patient in a short amount of time.”

Labcorp has completed more than 3 million molecular tests since first making its COVID-19 test available on March 5. Currently it can perform more than 90,000 tests per day.

They can also perform more than 300,000 serology tests per day. The collection for the SARS-CoV-2 antibody tests are available to be performed by Labcorp’s nearly 13,000 phlebotomists located in physician offices and health care facilities nationwide.



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Developing a vaccine

“Ultimately, the return to normalcy in some form will involve a vaccine or herd immunity,” says Dr. Caveney. In addition to lab testing, a significant portion of Labcorp’s work is in clinical research in about 100 countries. “We work on every conceivable type of clinical research — pharmaceutical, biotech, medical devices and more,” he adds.

“We have diagnostic expertise and are at the forefront of the COVID-19 testing process, both molecular virus-detection tests as well as a variety of antibody tests. So, we’re well-positioned to help all vaccine manufacturers, biotech and pharma companies who immediately started doing clinical trials.”

Labcorp is taking part in many of the vaccine trials and some of the trials for convalescent plasma therapy and other immune therapies.

With insight into global research, Labcorp is helping companies perform the diagnostic testing necessary to make sure a person is “virus naïve.” Dr. Caveney explains: “Meaning someone has never been exposed to a similar virus before. Then we do all the biomarker testing required to see how the body responds to the vaccine candidates. Are they developing adequate antibodies to it? Is it changing other components of their immune system so, if they are exposed to the virus after they’ve had the vaccine, their body will respond adequately?”

He’s optimistic about the quality and depth of research going on to find a vaccine. “Everyone in the world wants it done yesterday. But regulatory processes and good science require that patient safety, quality and thinking about the whole scientific process takes place so we can get to a suitable and safe vaccine.”

Labcorp’s commitment to its employees

None of this would be possible without Labcorp’s employees. “We’re very fortunate to have 65,000 colleagues and co-workers dedicated to the mission of improving health and improving lives around the world,” says Dr. Caveney. “We have a significant number of employees in China, not far from Wuhan. We were very aware of what was going on and were on the forefront from the very beginning.”

Employees include phlebotomists, couriers transporting COVID-19 test kits, lab techs, lab scientists and many supply chain staff. “Many have not taken a single day off, working 24/7 for the last three months,” he says. These employees are an integral part of the global response and are dedicated to fulfilling Labcorp’s mission every day.

“The health and well-being of our employees and their families is important to us,” says Dr. Caveney. “Through our partnership with Optum, we provide a wide array of clinical and well-being resources, both domestically and globally, that we’ve been able to leverage during this pandemic.”



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For example, Optum nurses are proactively reaching out to U.S. Labcorp employees who are at high risk for severe response to the virus to discuss COVID-19 education and precautions. They're encouraging members to obtain a 90-day supply of routine medicines when appropriate, educating them on virtual care, etc. They're also reinforcing resources available and having increased discussions around behavioral health and EAP virtual visits.

Many of Labcorp's global employees are heavily involved in clinical research — for example, clinical trials for cancer and other serious conditions.

"Life went on for them as their patients continue to have advanced cancer and other conditions aside from COVID-19," says Dr. Caveney. It was vital for these employees to stay connected and to continue to focus on their mission.

Optum Global EAP

"This pandemic has stressed everyone to some degree or another. It's shaken all of us," he adds. "Optum® Global EAP has helped our employees process how they're going to get through this, stay connected and continue to do their important work. They can stay connected to friends and family, but also to their work and the important things they are doing, like caring for their patients who are in clinical trials that are still going on during this global response."

From the onset of the pandemic, Optum Global EAP offered educational webinars and trainings to ensure employees were aware of the virtual resources available, and they've continued to do so. Optum EAP is supporting more than 16,000 global Labcorp employees across 51 countries with a 68% engagement rate across Optum EAP services.



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On-site Solutions and Wellness Champions

On-site Solutions from Optum also keep Labcorp employees connected and engaged. "Throughout this crisis, many of our employees have continued to go to work," says Dr. Caveney. "We have not all been as connected to each other as colleagues. We can't travel and can't have in-person meetings. We can't do what we normally do to connect to our workforce. We can send out emails and videos from corporate to the field, but what resonates with employees is the connection to and a bond with people they know, people they're used to being around."

U.S.-based Wellness Champions are leading local efforts with on-site activities focused on mindful eating and ways to remain active and minimize stress during difficult times. Digital wellness toolkits enable Wellness Champions to support employees who are working from home.

"Wellness Champions have been a way for people to stay connected to their work partners and work friends, not just their boss or people on the next WebEx call," says Dr. Caveney. "They've helped employees stay engaged and build good health habits and routines. Wellness Champions help our employees take good care of themselves so our employees can take good care of our customers."

Wellness Champions have spread the word about wellness programs that would benefit not only their colleagues, but their families as well. Labcorp continues to expand its Wellness Champion program, adding 17 new U.S. champions and 19 new international champions in Q1 2020, and have relied on them to help with communication and support during the pandemic.

When Optum recognized Labcorp's commitment to its employees with the "Achieving Population Health Management" award last year, no one could imagine how vital that commitment would be today. For Labcorp, keeping employees healthy and well is vital to the company's mission of creating a healthier world.



U.S.-based Wellness Champions are leading local efforts with on-site activities focused on:

- Mindful eating
 - Ways to remain active
 - Techniques to minimize stress
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For more information, contact your Optum representative or contact us at:

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