

MEDIA RELEASE

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More tests could save money and lives says international pathology expert

SYDNEY: A visiting American pathology expert says that Australia should be doing more pathology testing, not less, to save health dollars.

A consultant in laboratory management and editor of leading pathology publication *Dark Daily*, which has international readership, Robert Michel is highly respected in the field.

He said; “There are many examples of how diligent use of testing can save money, such as catching conditions early and helping individuals manage their chronic disease to avoid the need for hospitalization. It’s all about using the right test, for the right patient, at the right time.”

Mr Michel is in Australia to speak at the *Disruption in Healthcare* conference in Sydney on International Pathology Day (16th November 2016). He believes that pathology can be used more strategically:

“One example of a test is HbA1c (glycated haemoglobin) used for diagnosis and monitoring of diabetes - currently a major concern in Australia. When used regularly for monitoring this can help prevent serious complications such as kidney damage. Also, with hospital in-patients, better utilisation of creatinine testing can diagnose acute kidney injury more quickly preventing further damage.”

The Economic Value of Pathology report, released recently by Pathology Awareness Australia (PAA), showed that a small sustained decrease in HbA1c level in diabetic patients can reduce the cumulative incidence over five years in end stage kidney disease by 40%.

Pathology Awareness Australia says that pathology is used in 70% of medical decisions but is not well understood as it takes place behind medical laboratory doors.

Ambassador for PAA Dr Peter Harman said: “We want to improve understanding amongst the public and policymakers of the critical importance of pathology testing. The bottom line is that prevention is better than cure. Catching issues early or even before they begin is the best thing we can do for patients. Effective and appropriate use of pathology saves lives as well as money.”

Mr Michel says there is a global movement towards a more proactive and preventative approach and that Australia’s excellent pathology services must keep pace as new diagnostic tests and data become available.

“Pathology tests do not only give us information on how to treat an individual at one given time,” stated Michel. “Test results, such as those for notifiable diseases, contribute to the bigger picture of a nation’s health and can inform policy making, clinical guidelines and public health initiatives.”

Pathology testing used for precision or personalised medicine is already saving health dollars. This includes genetic tests for cancer patients to determine if a drug will be effective, for example BRCA gene tests for breast cancer patients.

“It is important for both the public and healthcare policymakers in Australia to understand how the expense of pathology tests, when used appropriately, can save huge amounts of money,” he continued.

“For example, using a pathology test to identify a specific genetic mutation in a patient’s cancer allows physicians to determine whether that patient will benefit from a specific cancer drug that can cost tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars.”

These tests provide the right treatment to those who will benefit. Importantly, test results can also help avoid the side effects, wasted time and unnecessary expense for patients who will not benefit.

Mr Michel says that the potential benefits of relatively simple pathology tests could be misunderstood and it is important that guidelines are clear on the best practice for which tests to use when.

“It can be difficult for physicians to stay up to date with best practice guidance and available tests. Doctors should be encouraged to use the expertise of pathologists and medical labs should also be taking a lead on communicating with clinicians on test updates.”

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Robert Michel is available for interview

Dr Peter Harman is available for interview

Notes

About Pathology Awareness Australia

Pathology Awareness Australia manages the Know Pathology Know Healthcare initiative (www.knowpathology.com.au). It is a not-for-profit company formed to improve understanding and recognition of Australia’s world class pathology services. The company represents 95% of the Australian pathology landscape and comprises the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, private pathology groups, public pathology groups, and manufacturers and suppliers to industry.

About Robert Michel

Mr Robert Michel is the Editor In Chief of THE DARK REPORT, an intelligence service and publication providing economic and strategic assessment of the clinical laboratory industry for senior executives and pathologists that was founded in 1995. He produces the Executive War College on Laboratory and Pathology Management, held every May. In 2006, Michel established www.DarkDaily.com. His DarkDaily e-briefings are now read each day by more than 20,000 people in 186 different countries around the world.