Latest survey findings indicate significant decline in molecular testing for cancer during COVID-19 pandemic

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The Association for Molecular Pathology (AMP), the premier global, molecular diagnostic professional society, today released the preliminary results of its "Molecular Testing for Cancer during COVID-19" survey of clinical laboratories. AMP's ongoing series of COVID-19 surveys are administered to monitor, understand, and collect real-time data on laboratories' efforts and experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic response. The latest anonymous survey assessed how important components of molecular diagnostic testing for cancer, including testing volumes, laboratory operations, clinical trial testing, patient samples, and turnaround times, were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The preliminary results included feedback from 163 representatives from academic medical centers, commercial reference laboratories, and community hospitals in the US and around the world.

Throughout the pandemic as resources were allocated to SARS-CoV-2 testing, clinical laboratories performing molecular diagnostic testing for cancer experienced numerous challenges with the required supplies and facilities, as well as difficulties recruiting and retaining appropriately trained laboratory professionals. Overall, 85% of respondents reported that molecular testing for cancer decreased during April-June 2020. Additionally, more than half of the respondents said that oncology testing for clinical trials decreased due to lower enrollment, reluctance to travel, or ability to perform testing. The survey results indicate that the pandemic will continue to have long-term effects on molecular diagnostic testing for cancer, as laboratories reported that the COVID-19 shutdowns decreased or halted their development or validation of new tests, increased turnaround times for tests, and stopped or canceled orders for new equipment.

"Despite widespread supply chain and staffing shortages, clinical laboratories around the world continue to work diligently to provide molecular testing for cancer patients throughout this public health crisis," said Antonia R. Sepulveda, MD, Ph.D., AMP President and Professor and Chair of the George Washington School of Medicine Department of Pathology. "The results of this survey bring to light the larger impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on patients' access to high quality, appropriate testing. Addressing the shortfalls identified in this survey will help to ensure that all clinical laboratory testing, including molecular diagnostic testing for cancer, can be performed in a timely manner."

The results from this survey underscore the significant supply chain and staffing shortages that were reported in AMP's April and August SARS-CoV-2 molecular testing surveys and show that they reverberate to molecular diagnostic testing for cancer. Addressing these issues during this

pandemic and any future pandemics is necessary for laboratories to continue to operate at full capacity and ensure that patients can continue to receive timely testing. AMP is continuing to emphasize two of the previous recommendations:

1. Reprioritize supply allocations based on clinical testing needs, which could change over time.
2. Support the clinical laboratory workforce that is essential to providing an effective medical and public health pandemic response.

AMP will continue to review and analyze the results of the survey as part of its ongoing commitment to share expertise, assess laboratory needs, engage key stakeholders and provide recommendations for improving future pandemic responses and ensuring more patients have access to high-quality testing procedures.

More information: SARS-CoV-2 Testing Survey Results: www.amp.org/advocacy/sars-cov-2-survey/

Provided by Association for Molecular Pathology

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