

Leading Laboratories and Quality Outcomes

HOW TORRANCE MEMORIAL MEDICAL CENTER DID IT



INTRODUCTION

The laboratory at Torrance Memorial Medical Center (TMMC) is a busy, bustling environment. Serving the number one hospital in the South Bay region of Los Angeles, TMMC performs more than 12 million tests annually.

“70% of clinical decisions are based on lab tests, and 80% of EMR are based on lab results. Many times physicians cannot make a decision until they get that lab result,” says Ihab Abumuhor, the Director of Laboratory Services at TMMC. “So we really are an integral part of the health system.”

Still, the TMMC lab struggles with many of the same issues plaguing labs across the country. Laboratories are currently facing significant challenges from a variety of forces, including a wave of older professionals retiring and increased demands on the workforce. These challenges have been further intensified by disruptions and workforce shortages related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

These are just some of the reasons that so many successful laboratories are having trouble generating the recognition they deserve, and differentiating themselves in a crowded field of service providers.

That's where The Joint Commission's Leading Laboratories program comes in.

THE LEADING LABORATORIES PROGRAM ELEVATES THE PROFILE AND VISIBILITY OF THE LAB

Leading Laboratories is a recognition program that, in addition to Joint Commission accreditation, helps exceptional labs distinguish themselves among medical laboratory colleagues, with hospital administration and within the patient community. All Joint Commission accredited laboratories are eligible for the Leading Laboratories program.

This program was developed by The Joint Commission in partnership with the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP).

TMMC BY THE NUMBERS

**#1 hospital in
the South Bay**

**512-bed
facility**

**90,000 ED
visits annually**

**12 million
tests annually**

**+200 lab
employees**

**“YOU OWE IT TO ALL OF YOUR STAFF IN THE LAB. IF YOU ARE DOING A LOT OF GOOD WORK, YOU NEED TO HIGHLIGHT THAT GOOD WORK AND GET RECOGNIZED FOR IT.”
— IHAB ABUMUHOR, DIRECTOR OF LABORATORY SERVICES AT TORRANCE MEMORIAL MEDICAL CENTER.**



When “The Joint Commission shares ASCP’s focus on continuous quality improvements,” explains Dr. Ali Brown, Chief Medical Quality Officer of the ASCP. “We’re both very much focused on patient outcomes. How do we demonstrate how much the laboratory does affect the outcomes of our patients and promote the role of our laboratories in the healthcare system overall?”

Leading Laboratories program is built around four foundational pillars:

1. Promoting laboratory visibility
2. Elevating quality outcomes
3. Supporting professional development
4. Cultivating trusted leadership

For Ihab and the TMMC lab, Leading Laboratories was the perfect next step for boosting visibility and highlighting accomplishments.

“It’s from both the Joint Commission and ASCP,” explains Ihab. “So it has a bigger magnitude than other recognitions.”

After some preliminary investigative work, Ihab and his team decided to go for it, and began the process of earning the Leading Laboratories designation.

TORRANCE MEMORIAL MEDICAL CENTER: AN OVERVIEW

TMMC is a 512-bed nonprofit medical center located in Torrance, California. It’s the number one hospital in the South Bay area, number five in Los Angeles, and number 11 in California. TMMC has been associated with Cedars-Sinai Health System since 2018.

The TMMC Department of Pathology and Clinical Lab has about 200 employees, including five pathologists, and nine managers. The laboratory performs roughly 12 million tests annually. They have eight outreach draw stations, as well as a blood donor facility on site.

TMMC is the first Leading Lab in the nation. They are accredited by the Joint Commission and Association for the Advancement of Blood & Biotherapies, and they’ve achieved Six-Sigma VP certification.

As part of their goal of delivering exceptional service Torrance Memorial Medical Center commits to “provide innovative, high quality, timely and effective clinical laboratory services.”



A PROVEN COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

One of the four pillars of Leading Laboratories is “elevating quality outcomes.” The TMMC laboratory has an established history of prioritizing excellence and standardization as part of their mission.

TMMC put quality first by:

Developing a structured quality committee – Ihab stresses that it is imperative for labs to build committees devoted to setting and maintaining standards. TMMC’s quality committee structure includes the Quality Steering Committee, a Lab Management Advisory Group, Outreach Committee, Pathology Informatics Committee, Clinical Pathology (CP), Anatomic Pathology (AP), Waived Testing and CP/AP Laboratory Quality Assurance Committee, as well as Section QA Representatives.

Building a robust quality plan and system – Instituting a fully-developed quality plan helps ensure standardized procedures and results. For TMMC, that includes producing an annual quality report — and ensuring that it is available and accessible to team members.

Developing purposeful quality metrics and outcomes – Work with your IT department automate important metrics, including:

- Lab analytics dashboards
- Cost of poor quality
- Blood utilization
- Morning AM labs (% resulted by 8 AM/9AM, for example)
- Impact of turnaround time on patient’s length of stay
- Positive cultures
- Non-conforming events
- Test utilization (underutilization and overutilization)
- Anatomic pathology metrics
- Patient wait times

- Customer satisfaction reports
- Blood culture contamination rates
- Pre-analytic errors report and recollection cost

Implementing meaningful dashboards – TMMC instituted dashboards for test utilization as well as non-conforming events (internal and external errors or incidents), which staff could then review on dashboards during QA meetings.

Completing quarterly reviews of process improvement goals – Regularly scheduled assessments of process improvement goals are crucial for generating feedback and allowing teams to implement data-driven progress. TMMC also completes a PDCA or A3 for each process-improvement goal.

Conducting regularly scheduled QA meetings – Rather than waiting for your monthly or quarterly QA meeting, Ihab recommends instituting weekly QA reviews to address issues in a timely fashion.

The TMMC team adheres to the following schedule:

- Daily huddles
- Weekly QA reviews (College of American Pathologists survey results, validation plans, new tests)
- Weekly Quality Steering Committee meetings (operations and quality)
- Quarterly QA meetings (divisional quality metrics)
- Monthly operations meetings

Ultimately, Ihab has found that the Leading Laboratories program integrated seamlessly with the work his team was doing to ensure high-quality testing and service.

“I don’t think I had to really work hard to motivate my team, because they know the importance of highlighting visibility and getting recognition,” explains Ihab. “I think if you communicate that to your staff, how it’s going to help in terms of elevating the profile of the lab, especially within your institution. I think that is critical, and will rally your managers on board.”

BENEFITS OF BECOMING A LEADING LABORATORY:

Leading Laboratories is the only program that provides detailed proof of a quality laboratory’s commitment to building a team that excels in enhancing patient care.

Participating laboratories enjoy a number of benefits, including:

- Building stronger, more resilient teams
- Facilitating and highlighting development of team members
- Garnering respect within the pathology and laboratory medicine community
- Elevating medical laboratories within the larger clinical care team and organization and healthcare systems
- Expanding awareness of the medical laboratory’s vital role among patients and the public

ABOUT THE JOINT COMMISSION:

For more than 75 years, The Joint Commission has been a global driver of quality improvement and patient safety in health care. Since 1975, The Joint Commission has accredited more than 2,200 ambulatory care organizations across the U.S. Their standards for excellence in care are developed in cooperation with industry peers and nationally recognized experts and are considered the benchmark for quality and safety.

Click [here](#) for more information.