

Decoding Doctors' Decisions

How system friction and patient agency affects physicians—and what this means for lab testing

Data collected on behalf of Siemens Healthineers
by YouGov, June 2025



In the decades since the widely cited statistic emerged that laboratory tests inform **70% of clinical decisions**,*

clinical laboratory professionals have strived to **quantify** and **solidify** the lab's value within the broader health system.

We thought physicians could help.

Healthcare professionals are under pressure. They must care for more patients, run more tests, and make faster care decisions—all while working with fewer staff, reduced budgets and reimbursement, and fractured access to services. A diminishing laboratory workforce threatens the collaboration doctors rely on for clinical clarity.

Clinical laboratory professionals validate and maintain more than 80,000 types of laboratory tests in use across U.S. laboratories to help physicians and patients inform care decisions.* Altogether, 14 billion test results are produced for patients each year.*

Though understaffing and financial pressure occurs system-wide, prolonged attention on addressing laboratories' operational challenges has eclipsed the value clinical laboratory professionals contribute to helping doctors interpret test results that support patient care.* While clinical laboratory services account for merely 4% of hospital costs, they are often a target of cost containment efforts.*

As a result, laboratory services have been consolidated and testing has been outsourced to centralized testing facilities, further challenging the collaboration between clinical laboratory professionals and physicians.

Meanwhile, the implementation of automation-heavy “dark labs” has risen to help keep test results generating amid staffing shortages.*

Yet in the age of automation, the human collaboration physicians depend on still counts.

This survey of 408 physicians highlights the indispensable role of clinical laboratory professionals and the laboratory services they perform to support patient care from the perspective of those who rely on these services daily.

The data overwhelmingly demonstrate clinical laboratory professionals' contributions are interwoven in clinical practice.

It also reveals pressure on physicians is bleeding into the clinical laboratory and becoming a shared burden. Doctors disclose:

- how significant laboratory testing is to their clinical decisions
- how systemic pressure is influencing their test orders, and
- how patient care depends on the support clinical laboratory professionals provide

Though clinical experience and evidence-based guidelines remain the foundation of their clinical decisions, the choices doctors make seem to also increasingly consider implications for patient satisfaction.

*Citations for this statistic can be found in the full [report](#).

408 Physicians

On behalf of Siemens Healthineers, a survey of physicians practicing in various specialties in the United States was conducted by the YouGov analysis institute to quantify physicians' viewpoints about the value of laboratory testing.

Specialties were identified and categorized into three common types of laboratory testing needs: primary/preventative care, specialty care, and acute care.

Total sample size was 408 physicians. Fieldwork was undertaken between June 6-12, 2025. The survey was carried out online. The figures are unweighted.

1,000 Patients

Separately, a survey of 1,000 U.S. patients, qualified by having had laboratory testing done within the past two years, was conducted during the same timeframe to obtain the patient perspective.

The figures have been weighted and are representative of all U.S. adults (aged 18+). Data was weighted according to the dimensions of gender, age, race, education, and geography based on an ideal weighting from census data, or if not available, from industry accepted data.

Both surveys were collected on the YouGov Panels, where each member agreed to participate in online interviews and had received an email invitation with a link to the survey.

Physicians describe how lab results inform care decisions

Though lab results are one data point, among many



Together, we help the health system and avoid unnecessary patient interventions.

100% of physicians agree lab results help streamline how they use other healthcare resources

(for example, more efficient use of imaging and biopsy).

Results help inform my decisions...

98%

of physicians have **modified a diagnosis or treatment plan** based on lab test results.*

...and help determine my actions.

98%

of physicians agree lab results help them **justify their clinical course of action**.*

What's the value of the lab?

Physicians' perspective vs. lab professionals' perspective

99%

of physicians agree ...

clinical lab testing **is an integral part of the healthcare system**

and the testing **lab professionals** perform for their patients **help them do their job better.**



95%

By comparison, **95% of lab professionals** agree they are a critical part of the healthcare system.*

And **94%** feel they can make a positive impact on patient outcomes as a lab professional.*

Physicians to lab professionals: "I trust you to help me ..."

provide accurate results

98%

have a **high degree of confidence in the lab** to relay patients' test results accurately.

meet my patients' needs

97%

have a high degree of confidence that the test **menu available to them is adequate** for their patients' needs.

determine the best
options for my patients

55%

heavily rely on the lab's expertise to confirm which tests are clinically relevant for their patients.

learn

96%

are **open to receiving constructive feedback** from the lab to improve or enhance their test ordering practices.



What affects you affects me, too.

94%

agree healthcare staffing shortages concern them.

However, the effect of lab staffing shortages is felt more acutely.

96%

Agree that when labs are short-staffed, it has a **downstream effect** on their patient care.

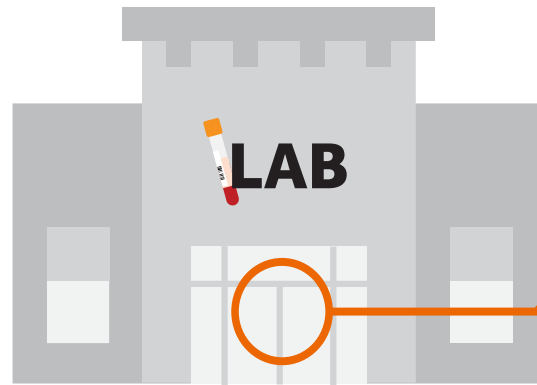


Read more about the impact of the workforce shortage on patient care, as told by laboratory professionals, in the *Clinical Labs in Critical Condition* report.



How your work affects my work

Timely results help determine the next step and support my interactions with patients



Lab results help provide meaningful interactions with my patients.



99% of physicians say...

delayed lab results
affect patient care.

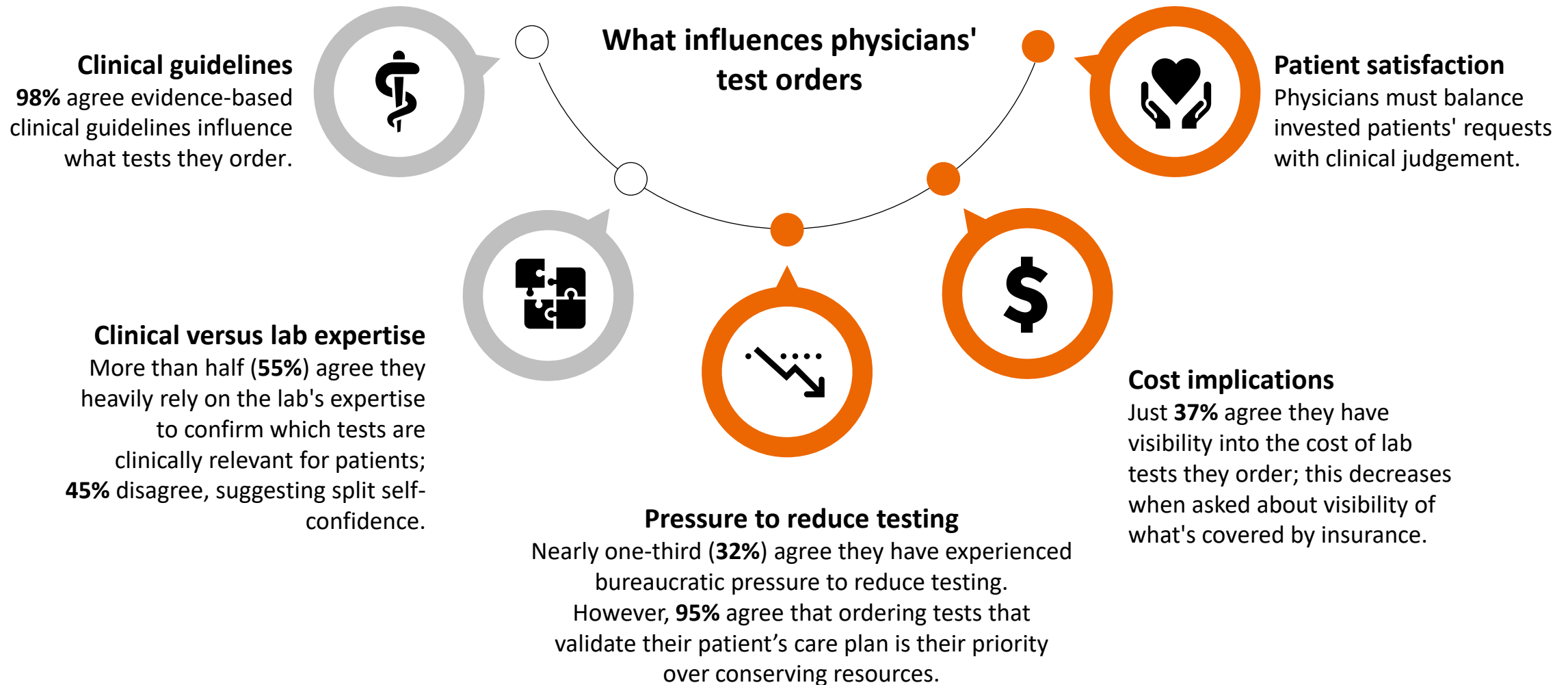
lab tests offer higher clinical value when the
results directly aid next step for my patients.

98% of physicians and 95% of patients agree...

visits are more effective and of greater
value when lab results are available and
discussed.

And what's affecting me also affects you

Systemic pressure influencing physicians' test orders is bleeding into the lab



While experience and evidence-based guidelines remain foundational to their clinical decisions, doctors are navigating other influential factors such as

patient satisfaction.

When patients raise concerns to their doctors, laboratory testing is usually an initial option for further exploration. Lab testing may be somewhat mitigating, though exploratory lab testing can generate confusion about what test results mean. This further underscores the necessity of collaboration between clinical lab professionals and doctors.

Doctors indicate laboratory testing also supports their efforts to avoid misdiagnosis.

69% say...

potentially getting sued for misdiagnosing a patient is a top-of-mind concern



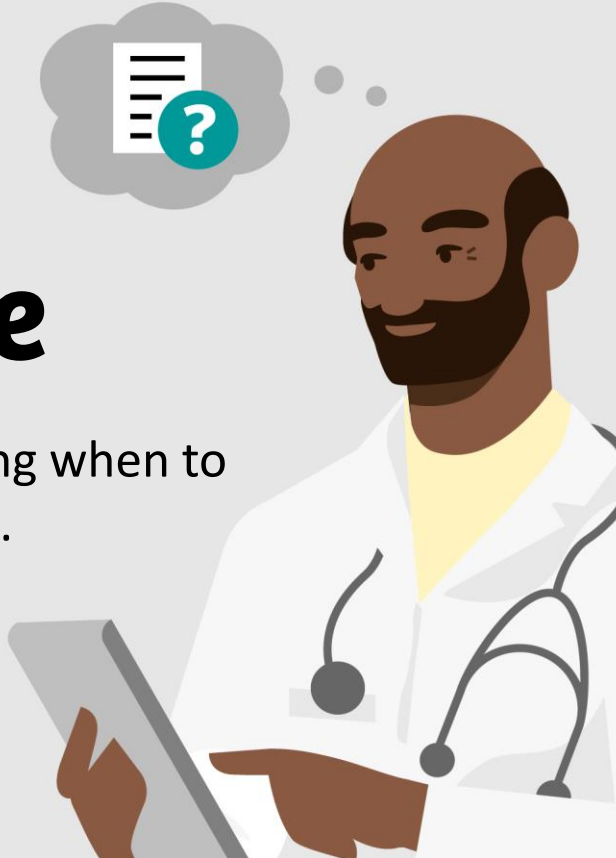
92% consider whether the tests they order might lower the risk of misdiagnosing a patient.

Physicians are confident in their expertise

They also share the emotional burden of adverse outcomes

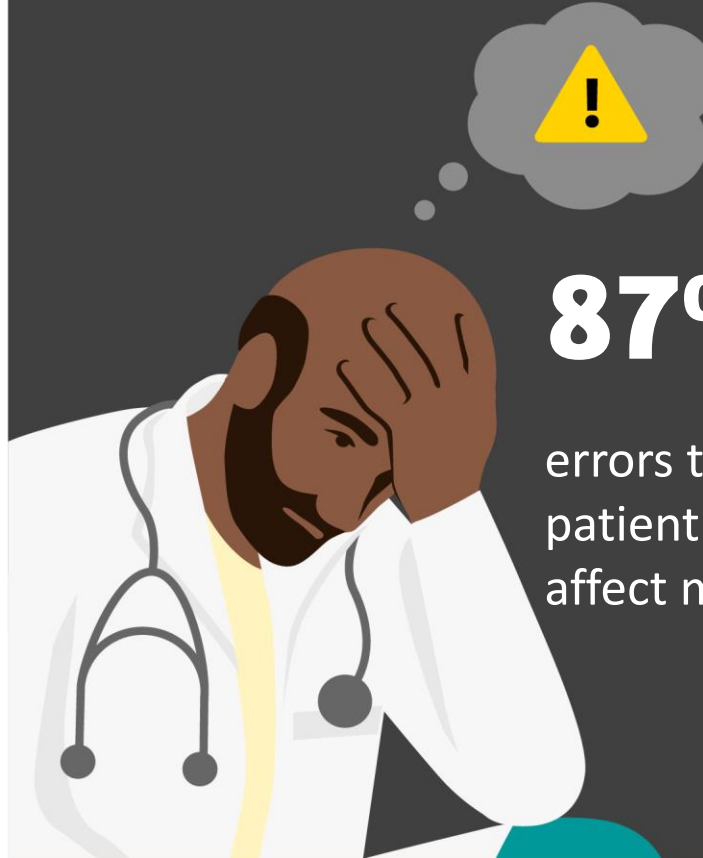
92% agree

I feel confident in knowing when to question a lab test result.



87% agree

errors that negatively impact a patient's care also negatively affect me.*



n = 408 physicians

*Test results are to be interpreted in conjunction with patients' medical history, clinical presentation and other relevant findings.

Tension between clinical judgment, patient expectations

When patient satisfaction meets patient agency

What is patient agency?

Patient agency refers to a patient's ability to **understand**, **contribute**, **influence**, and **act on** healthcare decisions that affect their care and outcomes.

Today's patients take a more active role in their care. They have more access to health information—and misinformation.

Though patients have rising confidence in their ability to find trustworthy health information and distinguish between good medical advice and bad, **there is an alarming surge in some patients' willingness to devalue their provider's medical advice** in favor of advice from friends, family, and even social media.*



**But is this trend making its way
into physician-patient interactions?**

How patient agency is affecting doctors' lab decisions

Patients are influencing lab testing, expect testing upon request

What doctors say...

Do patients agree?

90% agree

Patients **feel entitled to diagnostic testing of their interest** upon request.

93% agree

I **expect** my doctor to order testing of interest to me **upon my request**.

13% disagree

flags an erosion of trust in doctors or a growth in confidence toward self-advocacy.

76% agree

Patient requests have **forced me to weigh patient satisfaction against clinical judgment**.

87% agree

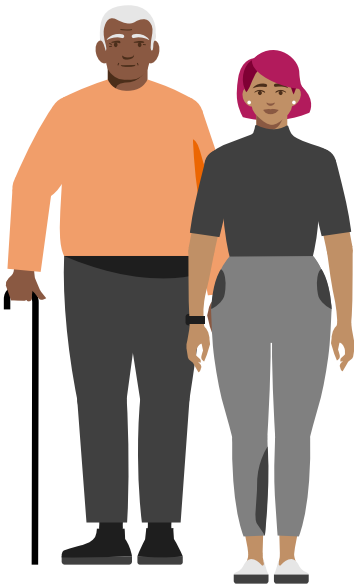
I **trust my doctor's recommendation** if they advise against a test I request.

84% agree

I **have ordered** lab testing **to satisfy** a patient's request.

37% agree

I **have asked for a lab test** of interest to me based on medical info I've learned from other sources.



Doctors also experience systemic pressure to reduce testing

How bureaucracy factors into physicians' test order decisions

Nearly 1/3 of physicians have experienced pressure to reduce their lab test utilization.

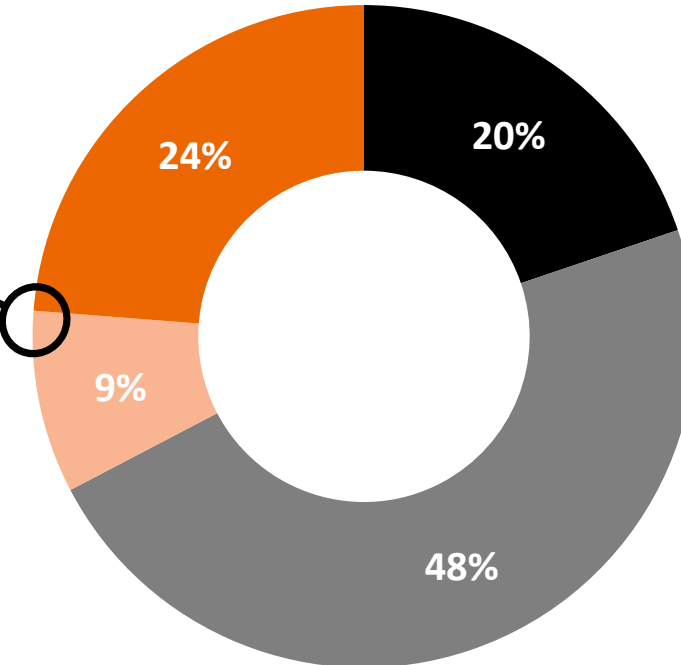
However, patient need and benefit remains top-of-mind.

95% agree...

ordering tests that **validate my patient's care plan is my priority** over conserving resources.

I have experienced bureaucratic pressure to reduce testing.

■ strongly disagree ■ disagree ■ strongly agree ■ agree



The cost of tests and inadequate healthcare coverage matters

Cost transparency helps me help my patients

67% of physicians

say they **do not** have visibility into whether the tests they want to order are covered by their patients' insurance.

Asked of physicians *with* visibility into insurance or cost of tests (n=176),

60% say

cost of a lab test has led them to **postpone** tests they would have otherwise ordered.

n = 408 physicians
n = 1,000 patients

Why cost transparency matters: the patient perspective

83% of the patients surveyed get bloodwork done periodically, ranging from monthly to annually.

5%

said they **have not done bloodwork** their doctor recommended **because it was cost prohibitive.**

29%

revealed they had **unpaid medical bills**, of which,

52%

said their **medical debt included** unpaid **lab testing fees.**

How new test options improve care for patients

What doctors say...

Do patients agree?

98% agree

Patients rely on me to **proactively avoid** disease or **limit their disease progression**.

90% agree

I rely on my doctor(s) to help me avoid disease or limit my disease progression.

98% agree

A lab test that provides a patient's risk of disease progression is **useful clinical information**.

89% agree

I am interested in lab testing that **can predict** my health risks.

92% agree

Patients are **more receptive** to lifestyle change suggestions **when supported by test results**.

94% agree

I am more likely to act on a recommendation my doctor makes if they can **justify it with my test results**.

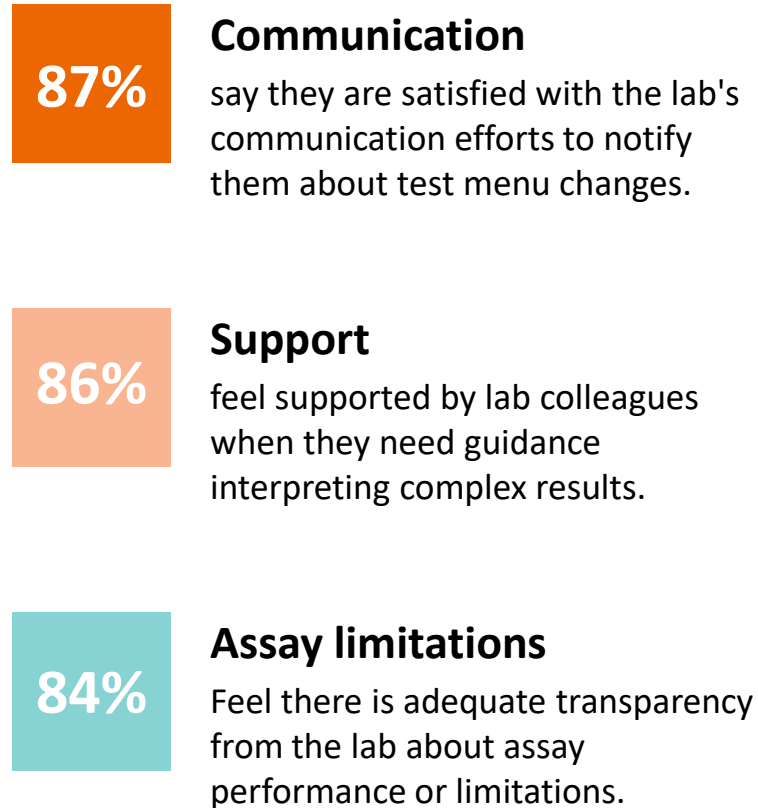
94%

I'm eager to adopt new and novel lab tests that can improve how I treat my patients.



Where lab-physician relationship fractures start to appear

Communication and transparency of information



Transparency

Don't receive information from their lab about test menu changes (e.g., new assays, discontinuing assays, restricted supply).

12%

Out of sight, out of touch

do not typically communicate with colleagues in the lab. Of which, nearly half (49%) indicated patients' orders are primarily outsourced.

19%

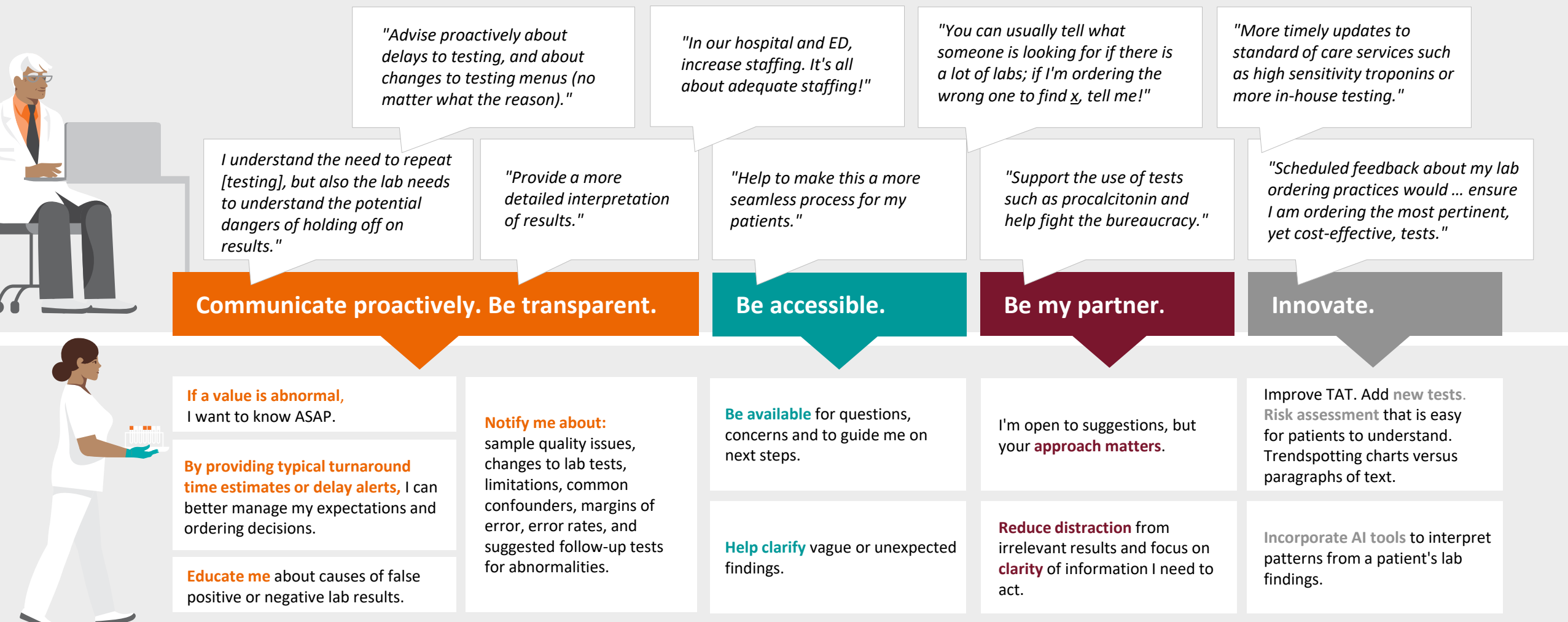
Efficiency shortcuts

Configure EHR* lab report settings to only flag outliers that require attention; 7% don't know how their settings are configured. Meaningful test results could be overlooked.

27%

How doctors and lab professionals can work better, together

Transparency and collaboration helps improve patient care



What hinders innovation in the laboratory?

Labs are squeezed to deliver faster, better results with fewer resources



Less budget

Economic uncertainty

More patient tests to perform

Higher operating costs

Higher costs to backfill

M&A and outsourcing

More test menu options to explore

Staffing vacancies

Faster turnaround time expectations

Lower reimbursement

Rise of chronic conditions

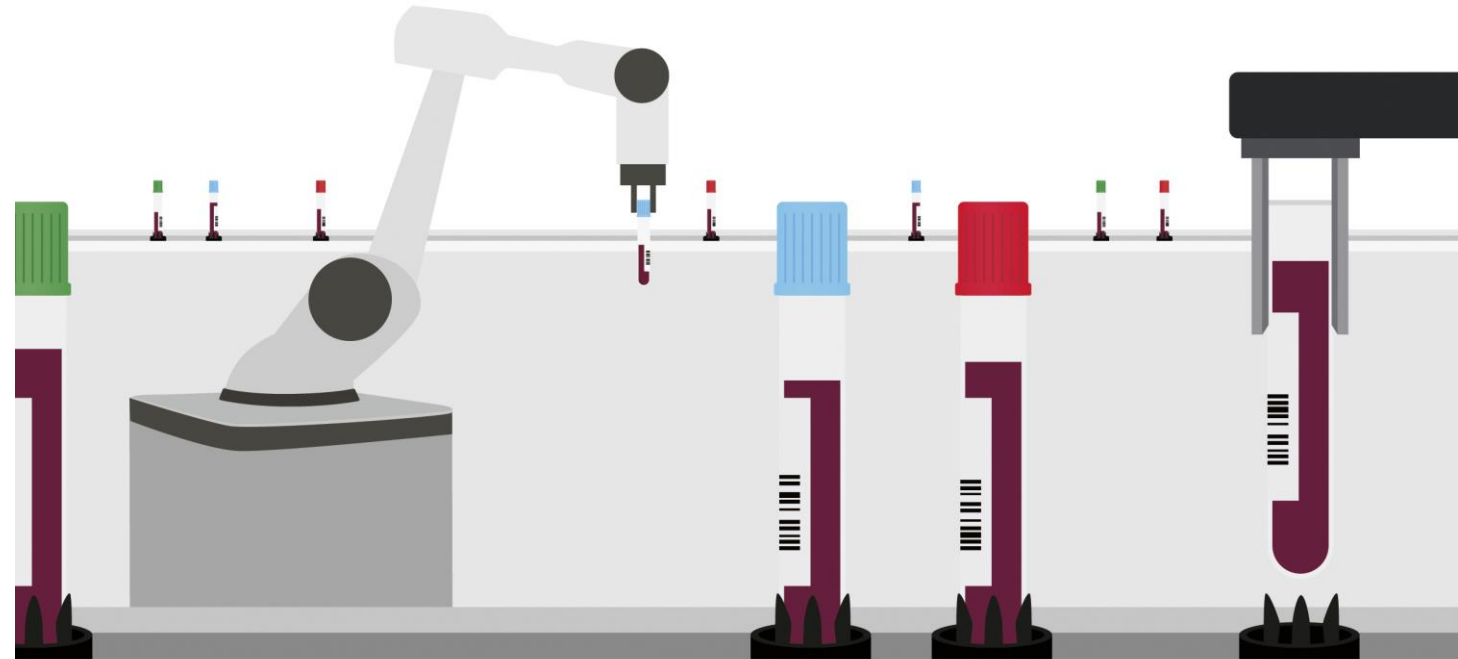
Why clinical lab innovation matters

Helps improve patient care, collaboration, and the lab's profitability

As the number of lab professionals available to support testing dwindles, and patient test volume and costs to operate the lab rise, many labs are turning to various levels of automation to reduce the burden of manual tasks.

Investing in laboratory technology enables staff to redirect time spent on manual tasks to other activities that support patient care such as clinical consultations and quality control.

Recognizing laboratory professionals as collaborative clinical partners, and resourcing clinical labs as essential infrastructure rather than cost centers, is vital to safeguarding the important clinical support laboratory professionals provide that physicians rely on.



Read the full report *Decoding Doctors' Decisions: How System Friction and Patient Agency Affect Physicians—And What This Means for Lab Testing*.

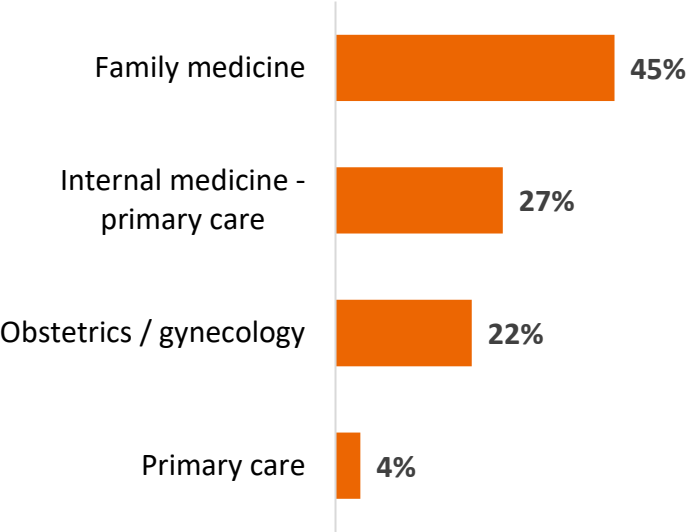


Appendix

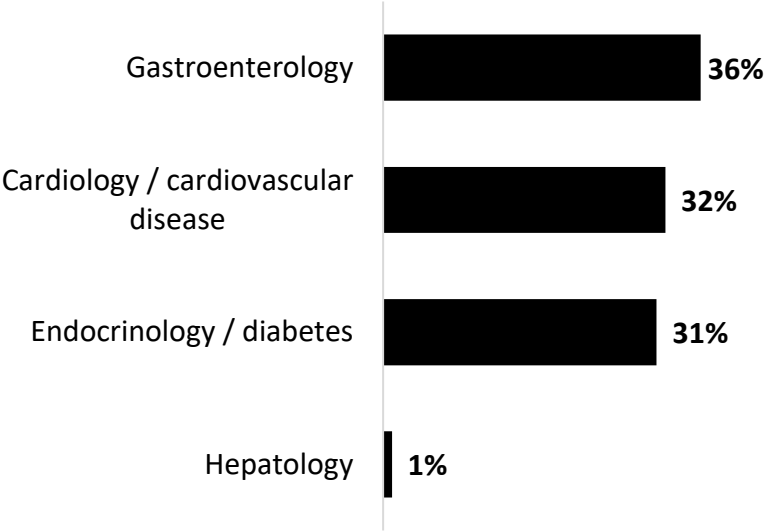
Respondent Information

Breakdown of respondents by specialty

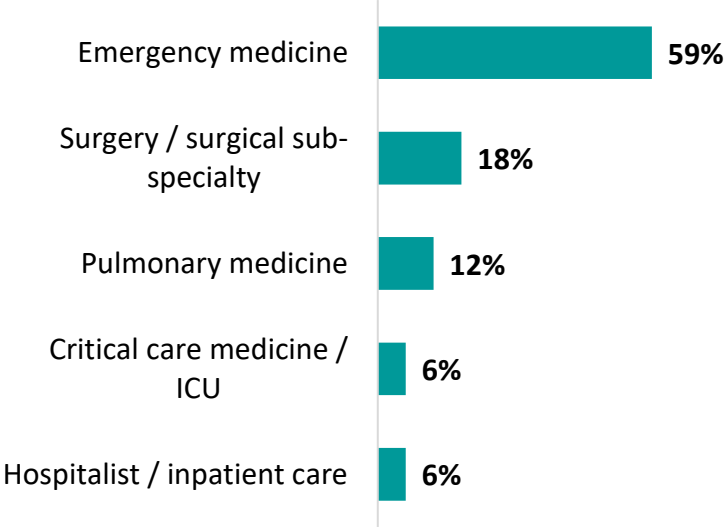
Primary / prevention care respondents



Specialty care respondents



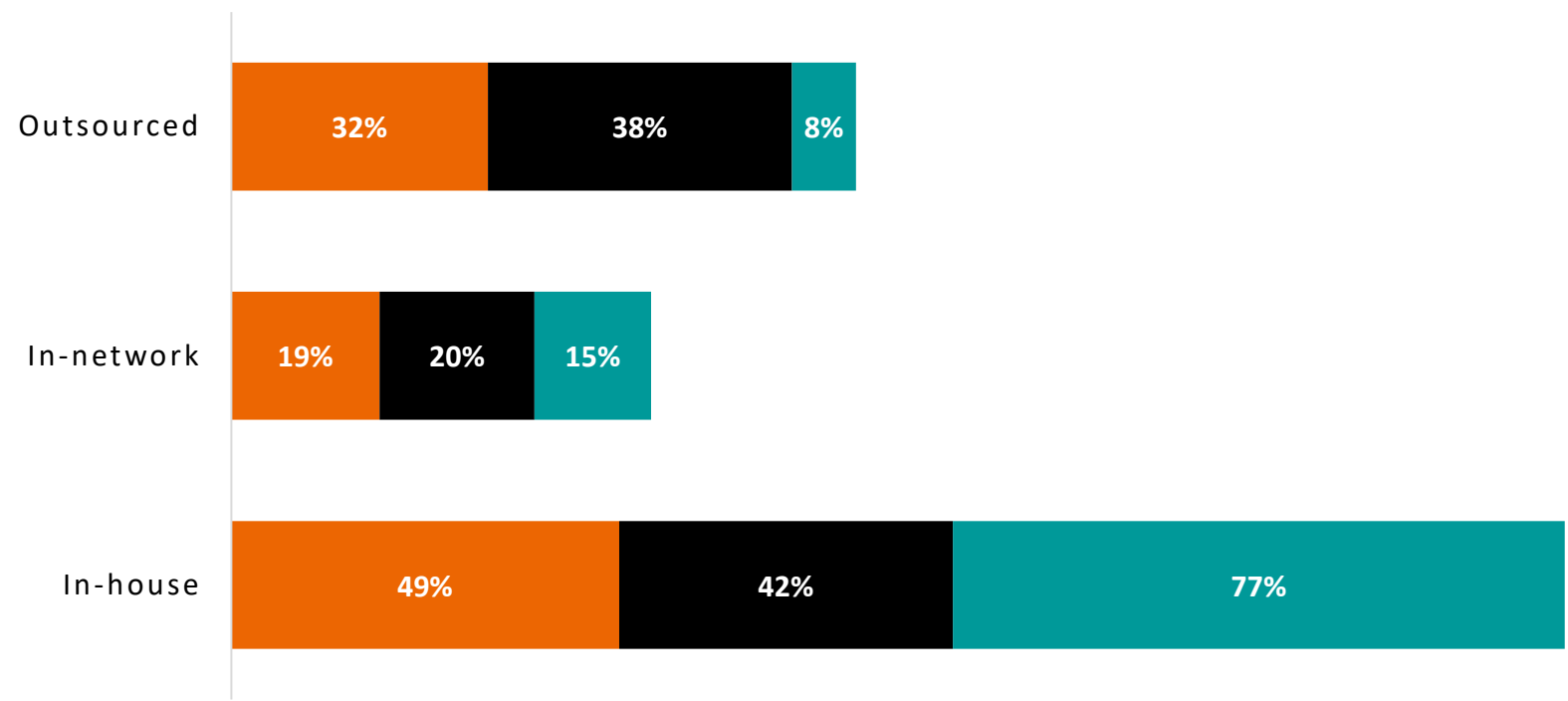
Acute care respondents



Where patient testing is primarily performed

By physician type

Primary/Preventative Care Specialty Care Acute Care



Combined

