

Getting from Here to There

As we know, medical error is the third leading cause of death in the US. While patient safety remains a struggle, with an error rate of 0.33% laboratory medicine has been a leader in reducing error. Advancements in automation and analytical instrumentation have helped reduce these errors but still, pre-analytical errors make up 75% of all mistakes.

We recognize these pre-analytical steps to be test ordering, patient preparation, sample acquisition, and sample transportation. But one step that has not been as much emphasized is the actual fulfillment of the test order. Fully 30% of patients never get the test performed.

Classically, in an in-house hospital setting, the lab goes to the patient bedside, as the phlebotomist, to collect the specimen or in an outpatient setting, the patient may come to the hospital lab for the blood draw. Additionally, the patient might go to a patient service center set up by either the hospital/laboratory, such as our patient service centers or those of a commercial laboratory. Outreach may also be at such entities as nursing homes, where either the lab sends a phlebotomist or their in-house personnel draws the specimen which is picked up by lab courier. In some instances, entities such as visiting nurses may go to patient's homes and draw specimens.

These efforts are usually of a local scale and vary from one laboratory entity to another. The problem is how to get the patient to the laboratory or rather, the laboratory to the patient. One scheme, along the lines of that classic quote from bank robber, Willie Sutton, "Why do I rob banks? Because that's where the money is" Quest Diagnostics has joined with Safeway to offer testing in 12 locations in California, Texas, Virginia and Maryland. Building on their experience from two earlier sites operating in Arizona, their PSCs, built adjacent to the in-store-pharmacy, feature interior designs meant to facilitate a secure and private environment. Quest plans to give patients contact devices that will enable them to shop during wait times. The CEO of Quest, Steve Rusckowski notes "We're building on what we learned in Arizona, which is that by providing laboratory testing services where patients also shop, we will make it easier for them to get the quality diagnostic insights they need in convenient locations."

If you think about it, this step is evolutionary not revolutionary. It is an extension of the processes we currently use. But what if there was a way that utilized a more 21st century approach to the problem? Igbo (I have no idea what that stands for, by the way) a 2015 startup company based in Richmond Virginia has come up with a different tack. It could be described as "Uber for Blood".

How it works:

An Igbo-enabled physician uses the Igbo online application to order a test provided by one of a network of laboratories. The appointment instantly goes out to a pool of phlebotomists. Priority draw goes to "Favorites" selected by the physician or those with high quality rankings (more about that later). The phlebotomist is provided with a smartphone, preloaded with the Igbo mobile application. When there is an invitation to draw, they can accept it — either with a click, or immediately if "auto-accept" functionality is activated. Igbo's exclusive Glidepath® process orchestrates reminders to the patient via email, text, and phone, working to make sure that there are no missed appointments through patient no-shows. Igbo provides the phlebotomist with

everything they need to complete a draw from start to finish, including preparation, packaging and shipping to the laboratory.

The ordering physician can specify which phlebotomist to use or allow the order to be fulfilled by a pool of phlebotomists. The patient is asked for feedback on their experience via web survey and that information goes in the quality ranking of the phlebotomist. The Glidepath function allows the patient to choose where and when the draw will take place. It also allows real time tracking, if the phlebotomist is delayed for any reason (traffic jams etc.) the request can be handed off to other personnel, so that the patient does not suffer delay. Every sample is monitored, tracked, and connected digitally. As a result, Iggbo saves time and money while improving compliance and patient outcomes.

According to their President, Mark Van Roekel, “ We offer convenience along with a reminder platform that ensures that appointments stay on track. With Iggbo, we have seen appointment compliance improve from 70% to 98% on average—even for draws scheduled weeks or months in advance,”

Operating in over 120 US cities, with a workforce of over 8,000 blood draw professionals, Iggbo’s on-demand platform benefits every vertical of healthcare—from health systems to specialty labs to tele-medicine to mobile diagnostics. With smart phone technology, Iggbo closes the last mile to the patient and maybe, if they have their way about it, reinvent healthcare’s service delivery model.

Want to know more?:

1. ‘Mobile App Puts Phlebotomists on Call’, Phlebotomy Today STAT!, July 2015
2. “Labs on Demand” Popular Science, July/ August 2016
3. <http://www.iggbonow.com>

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