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NextGxDx Launches Physician Portal to Streamline Genetic Testing Access, Ordering

by Turna Ray

HEALTHCARE INFORMATION technology startup NextGxDx has released a free, online platform for physicians through which they can search for genetic tests, compare tests offered between different labs, order a test, and receive results.

As molecular diagnostics become more integral to the delivery of personalized care, privately held NextGxDx launched this platform in an effort to streamline the workflow for busy physicians who need to order genetic tests for their patients. The platform lists more than 10,000 genetic tests, including those that are approved or cleared by the US Food and Drug Administration as well as those that are offered through CLIA-certified labs.

In a white paper that was released in conjunction with the physician platform, NextGxDx pointed out that although there are 10,000 genetic tests on the market, nearly 22 percent of molecular targets are available for testing through only one lab. "Integrating the rapidly growing world of genetic diagnostics with the day-to-day operations of a busy clinic is one of the most pressing challenges in medicine today," NextGxDx states in the white paper. "Despite the powerful information provided by genetic testing, and the perceived clinical benefits, barriers still remain for full adoption into clinical practice."

In a recent report, seven genetic counselors from ARUP Labs reviewed test orders for complex biochemical, cytogenetic, and molecular genetic tests between February 2010 and December

2010, and found that one-third of the cancelled tests were due to the physician ordering the wrong test.

NextGxDx is hoping to provide doctors with the necessary information and tools about genetic tests to avoid such errors. "One of our primary goals is to simplify the workflow and make genetic testing simpler for community doctors to use," Judsen Schneider, NextGxDx's scientific director, told *PGx Reporter*. "By supplying decision support tools to complement these genetic tests, we hope to increase the likelihood that community physicians will find them more useful in their practice."

Once physicians order tests through the web-based platform, NextGxDx generates a requisition form and processes the order. Then the order form is sent out to the lab where the test is performed. Test results are reported back to the physicians through the platform website.

Although there is no cost to physicians for accessing the NextGxDx genetic testing platform, labs pay a fee to include their test information in the service. According to Schneider, labs are motivated to submit their tests to the service because they recognize the opportunity to provide physicians with information about their tests and their labs.

"We charge our partner laboratories a small implementation fee and ongoing maintenance fee to cover the costs involved with linking their test catalog up to our database," Schneider said. "Labs also pay a service fee to NextGxDx for tests ordered through the NextGxDx platform." The test information included in the platform comes from the labs and diagnostics providers.

The company is planning to market the platform at medical conferences, where healthcare providers can test out the system. For example, it will be demonstrating the platform at the annual education meeting of the National Society of Genetic Counselors in Boston and at the Child Neurology Society Annual Meeting later this month, as well as at the American Society of Human Genetics Annual Meeting in November.

It took NextGxDx more than a year to develop the physician

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platform, which it beta-tested within large physician groups, labs, and among researchers to ensure that the user interface fit the healthcare professional's workflow.

"Much of our early work was spent with the neurology and medical genetics communities, due to the fact that they see by far the greatest number of rare genetic disorders," Schneider said. "Since then, our catalog has expanded to cover genetic tests throughout all of medicine."

In surveying the barriers physicians face in performing genetic testing, NextGxDx identified inefficiencies in reporting test results as one of the major roadblocks. Despite advances in digital technologies, most labs still use direct mail and faxes to report test results so the company believes that it can make the delivery of test results more efficient through its platform.

"One of NextGxDx's services is to provide test results back to physicians through our portal. We have seen many systems that can take upwards of a week to get results from a reference laboratory into the [electronic medical record], and into the hands of a clinician," Schneider said. "Our process is significantly faster. Upon completion of a test, laboratories upload the results to our site, and those results are then immediately available to the clinician."

The NextGxDx platform is encrypted to protect the privacy of patients, and test results are stored in compliance with HIPAA regulations. Although test results are reported electronically, cur-

rently they aren't incorporated into patients' EMRs.

Besides NextGxDx's platform, there are a number of other genetic testing-focused repositories that allow healthcare providers to find out about available tests. GeneTests is a catalog of tests operated by the University of Washington, while the National Center for Biotechnology Information has recently launched the Genetic Testing Registry. The University of Utah offers the Genetics Home Reference, a curated educational website about genetic tests and conditions for a general audience.

Like NextGxDx's service, these websites are freely accessible, but the company differentiates itself "in that we not only come at the problem from the point of view of scientists and medical professionals, but we also have deep expertise in technology and product development," Schneider said. "So we approach the problem from the perspective of streamlining workflow."

He noted that NextGxDx's web-based platform is scalable and can integrate with other genetic tools on the web. "We strive to create a one-stop shop for genetic testing. One seamless resource physicians can utilize for educational tools, decision support, test comparison, and test ordering," Schneider said.

Given the recent launch of the platform, the company felt it was premature to provide an estimate of how many physicians were using it. "However, we have had significant interest from hundreds of physicians and genetic counselors during beta testing," Schneider said.