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WITH LESS THAN 100 LABORATORIES IN COUNTRY ACCREDITED, MEDICAL RESULTS CAN BE WAY OFF MARK

It's time we tested our labs

Christin Mathew Philip | TNN

If you check your blood sugar or urea creatinin levels in three different laboratories in the city, chances are you will get three different results. While street corner labs offering simple tests for as little as ₹30 may be a cheap option for diabetics, experts say unmonitored proliferation of laboratories could be counter-productive.

Health officials say they are aware of thousands of laboratories functioning across the state, many without proper equipment or technicians, but they can do little in the absence of strict norms. All one needs to open such a lab is a trade licence from Chennai Corporation. Many such labs don't have proper ventilation, quality water supply, cold storage facility or waste disposal facility. Neither the state health department nor the civic body conducts inspection at these places.

Certification by agencies like National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL) or National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH) provide a formal recognition to the quality and technical competence of a lab. But these certificates are yet to be made mandatory for laboratories and less than 100 have applied for NABL accreditation in the country so far.

P Kalidasan, president of Paramedical Lab Education and Welfare Association, said the absence of a monitoring body poses a risk to patients. "Anybody can start a lab without following standards. There are no checks on chemicals or equipment used or qualifications of lab technicians. Despite several representations to the government to form a regulatory body to restrict illegal labs, nothing has been done so far," he said. He added that the process of getting NABL certificate is cumbersome and costly.

Many laboratories employ under-qualified people as lab technicians to save money. "It's difficult to get a lab assistant for anything less than ₹7,000 a month. It is tough to compete with modern labs. How do you expect us to employ a postgraduate diploma or degree holder in the lab?" said a lab owner in north Chennai.

Dr S Elango, former director of public health, said the absence of monitoring has led to inaccuracies in lab reports. "Like in the US, Japan and China, India needs a regulatory body on the lines of drugs control administration to monitor labs," he said. Officials in the drugs control administration said they are not monitoring labs, and they have records of only 17 labs which are attached to pharmacies.

Ideally, an accredited lab should have two pathologists, two microbiologists and two histopathologists, but a majority of small and medium labs has just one pathologist. Accredited labs are bound to give reports within a prescribed time. For instance, reports of haemoglobin and sugar need to be handed over to the patient in an hour, while the other reports must be done in three hours. These norms are seldom followed.

UNDER SCRUTINY

Testing centres require mandatory facilities they often don't have, and can often go wrong with samples itself



GOING UNCHECKED

- ▶ Most diagnostic laboratories in Chennai function only with a trade licence from the corporation
- ▶ No laboratory inspection is done to check equipment or staff
- ▶ The Centre has assigned National Accreditation Board For Testing and Calibration Laboratories with auditing diagnostic labs
- ▶ These audits are voluntary though
- ▶ Lack of standard for various laboratory tests may lead to inaccurate reports

COMMON SAMPLING ERRORS

- Blood sampling technique** | Delay in obtaining blood specimens may lead to release of red cell constituents like potassium which may cause varied results
- Prolonged stasis during venepuncture** | When plasma samples are concentrated, proteins and protein-bound components are falsely elevated
- Insufficient specimen** | In small samples taken, technicians end up testing less specimen leading to false results
- Errors in timing** | In collecting some samples, timing must be accurate or results will vary
- Incorrect specimen container** | Specimens should not be stored in containers that will affect their consistency and lead to inaccuracies
- Incorrect specimen storage** | A blood sample stored overnight before being sent to the laboratory can show false results

BASIC FACILITIES NEEDED IN LABORATORIES

- Separate reception room where requisition forms are received and reports are disbursed
- Specimen collection room, toilets, private rooms
- Collection facilities for disabled people, staff toilets
- Quality water supply
- Uninterrupted power supply
- Cold storage facility
- Record room
- Facility for sterilisation and disinfection
- Waste disposal facility
- Fire-safety equipment
- Ventilation, climate control
- Separate areas for staff for hand washing and food storage
- Communication and transport facilities

THERE ARE NO CHECKS ON CHEMICALS OR EQUIPMENT USED OR QUALIFICATIONS OF LAB TECHS. DESPITE REPRESENTATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT TO FORM A REGULATORY BODY TO RESTRICT ILLEGAL LABS, NOTHING HAS BEEN DONE

P Kalidasan | PRESIDENT OF PARAMEDICAL LAB EDUCATION AND WELFARE ASSOCIATION

Wrong diagnosis can kill, warn doctors

Janani Sampath | TNN

Geetha was worried when her twelve-year-old son had repeated episodes of fever and no amount of tests at a local lab showed anything suspicious. However, after a week when she took her son for tests to a lab attached to a hospital, he was diagnosed with typhoid. By then, the child had developed acute toxicity and dehydration. Had the first test results been accurate, the family could have been spared of a lot of trauma.

With several clinical testing labs mushrooming in the city without any monitoring, doctors say there are concerns

about diagnosis – and treatment – going wrong. Dr Subramaniam Swaminathan, infectious diseases specialist at Global Health City said this can be more dangerous in the case of infectious diseases. "We see many cases of misdiagnosis due to incorrect lab results," he said. "Sometimes wrong results can lead to death of the patient."

Most of the larger laboratories have fully automated equipment and quality control. Data obtained are subjected to statistical analysis to ensure that equipment perform as per standards and generate accu-

rate results. Dr Anita Suryanarayanan, vice-president, operations at Lister Metropolis, said a competent person to manage clinical testing labs is of utmost importance, followed by quality equipment. "Only qualified people can supervise equipment, kits, reagents that are purchased for testing and also ensure that reports are delivered accurately. The functioning and maintenance of a lab require a lot of money and cutting corners can have disastrous results," she said.

Dr Suryanarayanan also explained that apart from exter-

nal monitoring, every lab should conduct internal quality checks and assess the standards of testing at regular intervals to avoid confusion.

While laboratories are an integral part of the healthcare sector and every disease, however basic, needs clinical tests, it is also the responsibility of the clinician to oversee the investigation, said Dr Swaminathan.

"The doctor should always refer patients to reputed labs. The amounts charged for testing would not vary largely, and it is always better to take the safer route in matters of health," he added.

NO QUALITY CONTROL

Temp high but dog days still a few weeks away

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: Strong winds from the sea helped bring down the maximum temperature in the city by two degrees on Tuesday, a day after it rose to above 38 degrees Celsius.

On Monday, the regional meteorological centre (RMC) in the city recorded a maximum temperature of 38.6 degrees Celsius, while the airport weather station in Meenambakkam registered 39.2 degrees Celsius, which was one of the highest recorded in March.

With the temperature dropping by a couple of degrees in a day, the met department officials said there is still some time before residents in the city experience the dog days of summer. "There will be a reduction in temperature by one or two degrees in the coming days. The temperature is expected to soar only by the end of April," said S B Thampi, deputy director general of meteorology at India Meteorology Department (Chennai).

While the city recorded a maximum of 36.6 degrees Celsius on Tuesday, the drop in temperature in the suburbs wasn't much as the Meenambakkam weather centre recorded 38.4 degrees Celsius, which is 3.8 degrees above the normal temperature for this time of the year.

"It was quite hot today. I could experience the heat by mid-morning. Riding a two-wheeler has become a hassle for many as a few minutes in

Hot, hotter, hottest

Maximum temp (°C) recorded last week at Meenambakkam

March	30	30	April
29	37	38.4	38.4

Highest maximum in April in city (°C)

2013:	37.4	(Apr 17)
2012:	35.6	(Apr 18)
2011:	35.7	(Apr 30)
2010:	37	(Apr 1)
2009:	37.9	(Apr 15)

slow traffic make people struggle with heat, dust and perspiration. It is as if the dog days are going to be here sooner," said V Vignesh, a commuter.

The minimum temperature, too, went up by around a degree with the city recording 26 degrees Celsius on Tuesday.

According to the weather department, the maximum temperature is expected to hover around 36 degrees Celsius in the coming days. The city is expected to have a maximum of 37 degrees Celsius and a minimum of 26 degrees Celsius on Wednesday, according to the forecast by RMC.

In places such as Vellore, Trichy and Tirupathur, the maximum temperature crossed 40 degrees Celsius on Tuesday with Vellore being the hottest at 40.4 degrees Celsius.

ICF to start making stainless steel coaches from August

Chennai: Integral Coach Factory (ICF) will start manufacturing of stainless steel coaches in August on a large scale. The shells for these coaches will be made in the second unit of the factory that is being set up in the same campus.

The coach factory produced a record 1,622 coaches, surpassing the target laid down by the ministry of railways for 2013-14. These included 53 variants, including self-propelled coaches, Linke Hofmann Burke (LHB) coaches, AC coaches, sleeper and other non-AC coaches and high-

speed bogies. A statement from the factory said production involved high technological inputs, meticulous planning and execution and continued harmonious industrial relations.

ICF made 164 self-propelled coaches, including diesel EMUs for Jammu and Kashmir and suburban trains for Mumbai Rail Vikas Corporation and Southern Railway. It also manufactured 25 LHB coaches, 248 airconditioned coaches and 1,185 non-airconditioned coaches for express and passenger trains. TNN

3 students held for smuggling 44 liquor bottles

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: Police arrested three aeronautical engineering students for smuggling in liquor from Pudukkottai. They were caught during a vehicle check near Thorapakkam on Sunday night.

With parliamentary elections around the corner, Election Commission officials and police personnel are conducting vehicle checks to prevent transport of black money.

Police intercepted a car at a checkpoint and found cardboard cartons containing liquor bottles. There were 44 bottles of IMFL. Police arrested the trio and seized the bottles. Police also confiscated their car and are investigating.

NOCTURNAL NOURISHMENT

C Suresh Kumar



Summer is here and plants on medians are drying up because of the heat. In Ashok Nagar, a corporation worker was seen watering the plants at midnight. Parks department officials said they are watering the plants thrice a week because of the heat

Deer crossing road hit by vehicle near IT Corridor

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: On Tuesday evening, at the bustling Madhya Kailash junction, commuters were taken aback as a panicked spotted deer tried to find its way back to the nearby thickets. Minutes later, it was hit by a vehicle.

Vehicles slowed down and curious onlookers gathered as the deer tried to drag itself away from the crowd. But for over 30 minutes after the accident, no rescue effort was made.

Around 10 days ago a vehicle hit a fully grown female spotted deer near Birla Planetarium at Kotturpuram, killing it on the spot. In January, four deer were found dead on the IIT campus. While animal activists claimed they were hit by vehi-

NO RESCUE EFFORT FOR OVER 30 MINS

cles, forest officials said the animals were attacked by dogs.

"We did not receive any information about an injured deer. Usually traffic police inform us if they see a dead or injured deer," said an official from Guindy National Park on Tuesday.

But, forest range officer S Davidraj said the deer had been rescued and was being provided care at the animal rescue centre in Velachery.

In the face of thinning habitat, the search for food often proves fatal for these animals that are knocked down while trying to cross the road.

Deer on the CLRI, IIT and Raj Bhavan campuses often stray onto the streets and railway tracks and get run over by trains and cars.

Rush for ₹1 tickets grounds airline website

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: R Ambika, who handles domestic tickets at a travel agency, had a hectic day on Tuesday after SpiceJet announced a three-day sale of ₹1 tickets on its direct flights. A large number of clients made enquiries, and most people who booked tickets planned to travel with their families to Madurai, Trichy, Goa, Delhi and Mumbai.

Though the ₹1 tickets, excluding taxes, were sold out, many bought tickets to more than one destination because fares worked out cheaper to travel in a group in September, November and December. Tickets on select routes were also priced at ₹799 and ₹1,490. Chennai-Mumbai tickets were selling at ₹1,500 for Sep-



A survey done by an online ticketing firm revealed that 10% of the people booked more than once and family holiday was the prime reason for booking tickets

tember and December while the same tickets are priced at more than ₹3,500 on other airlines. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation later asked the airline to stop the exercise.

Traffic on the airline's website was so high that it crashed. "We worked with our service provider to increase server capacity, and also set up separate and additional booking links for online agents and travel

portals to make bookings," said a SpiceJet spokesperson.

"The deal was popular because it worked out cheaper for a family of four or five travelling to Delhi or Mumbai around holidays during the year," said Prema Radhakrishnan of Emerald Airways.

MakeMyTrip saw a six-fold jump in sales on Tuesday. "SpiceJet's sale is different from previous offers because

travel period extends well into the first quarter of 2015. This gives travellers a chance to plan and book not only for their year-end holidays but also festivals such as Baisakhi and Holi," said Rajesh Magow, co-founder and chief executive office, India, MakeMy-Trip.

A survey done by the online ticketing firm revealed that "10% of the people booked more than once and family holiday was the prime reason for booking tickets."

The sale also has encouraged people to plan their travel by flights in the hope that other airlines may follow suit. "We received several enquiries from people asking if other airlines have started reducing fares," said Basheer Ahmed of Metro Travels.

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