2026 REPORT

Pulse of the ONCOLOGIST



Real voices. Real challenges. Real opportunities to improve cancer care.

Cancer care is advancing at an unprecedented pace, yet oncologists are navigating mounting challenges as they work to deliver the best outcomes for their patients. Growing complexity, digital friction and persistent access gaps have made time the most critical currency in care.

To better understand these pressures and priorities, we surveyed **152 U.S. oncologists** and analyzed industry data to uncover **five urgent trends shaping oncology in 2026**. These insights reveal where diagnostic partners can make the greatest impact, helping clinicians reclaim time and deliver care that's smarter, faster and more connected.

Trend 1: Time is the critical currency

Oncology complexity is accelerating but turnaround times haven't kept pace. The wait for test results stalls treatment decisions, putting patients at risk and driving $4.9 billion in added annual costs.

Opportunity: Deliver faster results, streamlined workflows and clear interpretations for timely decisions.

Key stats

- 89% say oncology is becoming more complex
- 60% cite turnaround time as a top challenge

This gap between complexity and speed is widening, and it's unsustainable.

> "We have cutting-edge diagnostics at our fingertips, but if my patient can't afford it, it might as well not exist."
>
> — Oncologist, Academic Medical Center

Trend 2: Innovation without access

Breakthroughs in molecular residual disease (MRD), liquid biopsy and multi-cancer early detection (MCED) are reshaping oncology diagnostics, but cost and coverage remain the greatest barriers.

Opportunity: Improve access through transparent coverage, payer alignment and strong patient financial support.

Key stats

- 52% cite insurance coverage as a major barrier
- 42% identify patient cost as a major concern
- Cancer patients face $16.2 billion in annual out-of-pocket costs

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Trend 3: Digital friction in a virtual future

Virtual care is rising, but digital tools are not keeping pace.

The healthcare ecosystem is rapidly shifting toward virtual-first care models, such as remote monitoring and digital second opinions, but the digital infrastructure hasn't kept pace. Fragmented electronic health record (EHR) systems, limited interoperability and manual workflows create friction that slows care and increases administrative burden, making it harder to realize the promise of virtual care.

Opportunity: Support seamless EHR ordering, real-time tracking and interoperable digital workflows.

Key stats

- 41% struggle with EHR connectivity
- Only 56% of oncology tests are ordered through the EHR
- Up to 10 minutes saved per order with better integration

Trend 4: Clarity is essential for actionable care

The precision-medicine era has unleashed an unprecedented volume of genomic data, but turning data into decisions remains a challenge. Reports are often complex and ambiguous, making it difficult for oncologists to act confidently on genomic insights. As testing expands, the need for clarity grows. Standardized, intuitive reporting is critical to translate insights into timely, informed care.

Opportunity: Provide clear, standardized reports with defined next steps and expert consultation.

Key stats

- 22% find reports unclear
- 18% question report specificity
- 75% of hereditary cancer testing cases involve genetic counselors

> "Every day lost in testing widens the gap between diagnosis and treatment."
>
> — Oncologist, Academic Medical Center

Trend 5: Human connection remains a differentiator

Despite rapid technological advances, oncology remains deeply human, and the workforce is feeling the strain. Rising burnout and workforce shortages underscore the importance of clarity, empathy and trusted collaboration. Human connection is a critical differentiator in easing both the administrative and emotional toll of care.

Opportunity: Strengthen support through expert guidance, genetic counseling and reduced administrative burden.

Key stats

- 14% cite limited access to lab experts
- 26% say patient support services help set a lab apart

Conclusion

Oncologists consistently emphasize five priorities: speed, access, digital simplicity, clarity and human support. Diagnostic partners who deliver on these priorities help reduce friction across the care journey, transforming complexity into confidence and enabling clinicians to focus on what matters most—caring for patients.

View the full report at
oncology.labcorp.com/pulse-of-oncologist

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