



Molecular Diagnostics in Clinical Laboratory Medicine: Recent Advances and Future Prospects

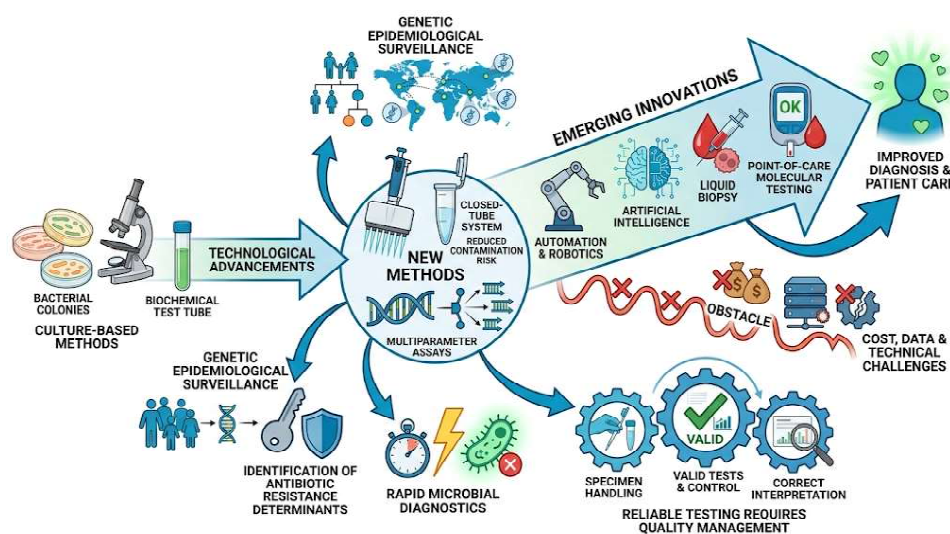
Shilpa Kundu¹, Muskan Sultana Parvin¹

Department of Medical laboratory Technology Paramedical College Durgapur,
Bidhannagar, Durgapur, West Bengal 713212, India

ABSTRACT

Molecular diagnostics of infectious diseases, particularly nucleic-acid-based methods, is a rapidly expanding field of clinical laboratory diagnostics. These applications are progressively replacing or enhancing culture-based, biochemical, and immunological methods in microbiology. As standard tests, early nucleic acid assays are monoparametric, meaning that only detect one parameter. The development of multiparameter assays using microarrays, multiplex nucleic acid amplification techniques, or mass spectrometry is now enabled the development of technological advancement and new methods, and the introduction of closed-tube systems has led to rapid microbial diagnostics with a consequently reduced risk of contamination. These new technologies make it possible to perform microbial epidemiological surveillance at the genetic level or simultaneously identify numerous antibiotic resistance determinants, whereas early assays focused primarily on the detection and identification of microbial infections. For testing to be reliable labs need to have good quality management. This includes handling specimens making sure tests are valid having good quality control and interpreting results correctly. However there are some problems that can prevent people from using these technologies. These problems include costs, technical issues, the need for special facilities and problems with analyzing data. Some new developments like automation, artificial intelligence, liquid biopsy and point-of-care molecular testing are expected to make diagnosis more precise and available to people. This review looks at the basics of diagnostics the important technologies and how they are used in clinics. It also talks about quality control in labs evaluating diagnosis and the problems of cost and access. In terms molecular diagnostics is, about using molecular technologies to improve diagnosis and patient care.

Keywords: Molecular diagnostics; Infectious diseases; Nucleic acid amplification; Multiplex assays; Microarrays;



GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT

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1. INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of microbiological diagnostics in medicine is the detection, identification, and drug susceptibility testing of microbial pathogens. Particularly, antibiotic susceptibility testing provides essential information for selecting appropriate treatment decisions. The epidemiological genotyping of isolated organisms is also vital for monitoring and tracking infection routes. In order to efficiently prevent and treat infections in both community and healthcare facilities, this is a vital responsibility. With a number of commercial tests available, the use of molecular assays in medical laboratories is increasing due to advances in technology, comprehensive studies on bacteria, and the development of new nucleic acid-based techniques. This review mainly focuses on nucleic acid-based molecular techniques for identification and resistance determination in clinical bacteriology. It provides an overview of current bacterial diagnostic methods in clinical use as well as an outlook on future technologies, including those that deal with the multiparametric detection of infectious disease-related determinants. Examples from various fields of clinical microbiology, such as clinical virology, will be included as well where appropriate (Ewalt & Hsiao, 2024;). By moving from traditional methods to reliable, rapid nucleic acid analysis and utilizing technologies like digital PCR and next-generation sequencing, molecular diagnostics has revolutionized clinical laboratory treatment (Schmitz et al., 2022;). Increased automation, point-of-care testing, and the integration of artificial intelligence are the primary areas of development in the future (Kubista et al., 2024). Molecular diagnostics techniques differ from the ways of doing things. They can detect infectious diseases and genetic problems effectively (Okeke & Ihekweazu, 2021;). They can even analyze DNA or RNA to understand what is happening (Schmitz et al., 2022;). There are several advanced technologies used in molecular diagnostics. These technologies include polymerase chain reaction, or PCR for short and real-time PCR, and digital PCR (Liu et al., 2023). Then there is fluorescence in hybridization or FISH and next-generation sequencing or NGS. These technologies have improved the diagnosis and characterization of infectious diseases and genetic disorders, and cancers. Molecular diagnostics and molecular techniques and technologies, like PCR and NGS are making a difference. Molecular diagnostics has become an important part of modern clinical laboratory medicine. It has changed the way many diseases are diagnosed, monitored, and treated. This field involves finding and analyzing DNA or RNA parts to spot genetic problems, harmful germs, and changes in the body that are linked to disease. When compared to traditional testing methods, molecular techniques can provide very accurate and quick results. This makes them extremely useful for identifying issues and facilitating treatment. New developments like polymerase chain reaction (PCR), real-time PCR, generation sequencing (NGS), digital PCR, and CRISPR-based tests have made molecular diagnostics much more effective (Weng et al., 2023). These tools are now used more and more in checking for

infections, find cancer and understanding it better dealing with inherited issues ,and offer care that is appropriate for each patient (Yadav et al., 2023;).New methods like biopsies and looking at genes have also made it easier to find and track diseases without requiring extensive procedures (Kubista et al., 2024).

2. PRINCIPLES AND TECHNOLOGIES OF MOLECULAR DIAGNOSTICS

The basic idea behind diagnostics is to find make more of, study or measure certain biological molecules that are connected to sickness. DNA and RNA are the things that get looked at the most. What the molecular target means can change depending on the test. It might be a germ, a change in genes a problem, with chromosomes a change linked to a tumor or another type of molecule that's connected to a disease. The fundamental concept of molecular diagnostics involves detecting genetic material associated with diseases. DNA or RNA is extracted from a patient sample and analyzed employing an appropriate molecular method. Depending on the examination, the objective might be a pathogen, mutation, gene, chromosome, or molecular marker linked to cancer. Molecular diagnostics is about finding DNA, RNA or other molecular markers that are connected to a disease or biological state (Ewalt & Hsiao, 2024). The basic idea of diagnostics includes taking out increasing, finding, measuring and studying nucleic acids or various molecular targets (Goodwin et al., 2021). We use methods to increase the amount of specific genetic material, which makes it easier to find even when there is not much of it (Liu et al., 2023). Molecular diagnostic techniques can give us precise and very specific results, which is better than many old diagnostic methods (Kubista et al., 2024). These techniques can find pathogens on and can also show genetic mutations, signs of antimicrobial resistance and molecular changes connected to diseases (Elvin, 2024). Molecular diagnostics is very important, for medicine because molecular data can help doctors choose treatment options and predict how well a patient will respond to therapy (Li et al., 2022).When we combine testing with clinical and pathological results it makes the diagnosis more accurate and helps take better care of patients (Weng et al., 2023).Another important principle is that molecular results should be interpreted together with the patient's clinical symptoms, medical history, and other laboratory findings. This provides a more complete picture of the patient's condition and helps healthcare professionals make appropriate diagnostic and treatment decisions.The Polymerase chain reaction or PCR is an useful method for diagnosing diseases. It can quickly make copies of specific parts of DNA (Schmitz et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023). Real-time PCR, also known as qPCR is a type of PCR that can make copies of DNA and check them at the time (Peaper et al., 2023).This makes it very useful for finding and measuring agents and genetic markers (Liu et al., 2023).The Polymerase chain reaction is used for this because it is so good at finding these things (Altindi° & Kahraman Kilba°, 2023). Next-generation sequencing or NGS is another method that can look at a lot of DNA or RNA sequences (Goodwin et al., 2021). It is especially good at finding genetic changes all at once (Chen et al., 2024) . Digital PCR or dPCR is a precise method that can measure nucleic acids very accurately (Li et al., 2022). It is very useful for finding targets that are not very common (Merino et al., 2022) . The Polymerase chain reaction and other methods like it are very important for this. Isothermal amplification methods, like LAMP can make copies of acids at a steady temperature (Wu et al., 202).This makes them very useful for diagnoses in places where resources are limited. Molecular assays that use CRISPR are very good at finding nucleic acid targets (Weng et al., 2023). They do this by recognizing the sequence of the acid. The Polymerase chain reaction and these other methods are all very useful for diagnosing diseases (Merino et al., 2022). Ensuring that the test results are accurate and reliable is a part of molecular diagnostics. The steps of

sample collection nucleic acid extraction, amplification, detection and quality control must be carried out at every stage of testing. When choosing technology one must consider the type of disease the target, the amount of genetic material that is present and the resources that are available, in the laboratory. Rapid and modern techniques have made molecular diagnostics able to deliver results and to help with early disease detection, accurate diagnosis, monitoring of treatment and tailored patient care. In sort these technologies have become a component of modern laboratory medicine because molecular diagnostics help healthcare professionals make better and more timely clinical decisions.

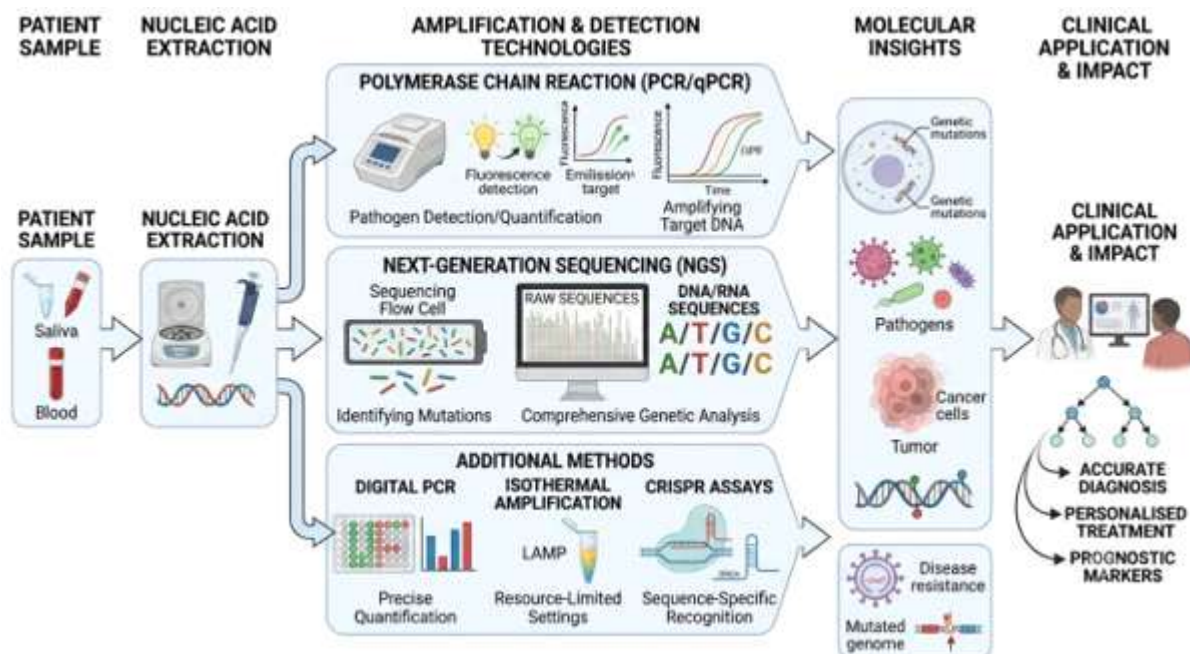


Fig. 1: Principles and technologies of molecular diagnostics. Molecular diagnostics detects specific DNA, RNA, or genetic markers associated with diseases. It uses techniques such as PCR, RT-PCR, sequencing, hybridization, and CRISPR for rapid and accurate detection of pathogens and genetic abnormalities.

3. CLINICAL APPLICATION IN INFECTIOUS DISEASES, ONCOLOGY AND GENETIC DISORDERS

Molecular diagnostics has made a difference in how doctors diagnose and treat many different diseases. When it comes to infections these tests find the germs causing the illness fast and with accuracy. For conditions these methods spot inherited changes and help find problems early. They also help with understanding the chances of passing on a condition and giving advice to families. All these uses make lab tests quicker more accurate and better suited, to each patient.

Table 1: Advantages of Molecular Diagnostics in Clinical Applications

Clinical domain	Coreapplications	Key Biomarkers & Target Technologies	Primary Clinical Impact	References
Infectious Diseases	Fast detection of viruses, bacteria, fungi and parasites without waiting for cultures. Direct identification of	Antimicrobial resistance genes such as <i>mecA</i> , <i>vanA</i> , indicators. DNA or RNA that belongs to pathogens.	Stops the delays that come from cultures lets doctors prescribe the right antibiotics right away improves antibiotic use and stops	Altindi° & Kahraman Kilba°, 2023

Table (Continued)

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Clinical domain	Coreapplications	Key Biomarkers & Target Technologies	Primary Clinical Impact	References
Oncology	resistance genes. Quick management of infections and monitoring of outbreaks. Detailed analysis of tumor molecules to guide treatments. Using biopsies to watch the cancer instead of taking tissue samples. Checking for amounts of cancer left after treatment and new mutations that resist drugs.	Technologies include multiplex PCR panels, real-time qPCR and point-of-care nucleic acid tests. Circulating tumor DNA.Cancer-causing mutations such as EGFR, KRAS, BRAF, BRCA1/2. Technologies like focused next-generation sequencing panels, digital PCR and liquid biopsies.	disease from spreading early. Shifts treatment to precision oncology finds the best therapies from the tumor's genes and detects cancer returning much earlier than pictures can show..	Azzalini & Bonin, 2024
Genetic Disorders	Finding inherited and single-gene diseases. Testing parents for carrier status when planning a family. Finding changes in DNA structure and small mutations that cause illness	Single nucleotide variants, copy number variations and micro-deletion.Technologies like whole exome sequencing, whole genome sequencing and targeted gene panels.	Replaces diagnostic quests with clear answers helps doctors act quickly and assists families in making informed family-planning choices, with personalized genetic counseling.	Ewalt & Hsiao, 2024.

4. LABORATORY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND DIAGNOSTICS INTERPRETATION

Management the quality of a laboratory is really essential for making ensuring the results of diagnostic tests are accurate (Ewalt & Hsiao, 2024) .Because Molecular tests are highly sensitive so we need to make sure we control every stage of the testing process from getting the samples to analyzing them and then sharing the results. This means we have to do things like specimen collection and handling samples properly use testing methods that we know work keep an eye on the equipment maintenance and supplies we use and regularly check that our staff knows what they are doing. In labs that do testing we have to be especially careful to prevent contamination because even a minor contamination of the wrong stuff can give us false positive results (Elvin, 2024). To avoid mistakes we follow procedures use controls to make sure our tests are working right maintain laboratory equipment and maintain accurate records. For techniques like next-generation sequencing we also have to make sure our equipment is working right our software programs are giving us the right answers and we are storing genetic information safely (Ewalt & Hsiao, 2024). Continuous quality monitoring, internal quality control, corrective actions, and compliance with relevant standards are essential. If we have a system for managing quality we can trust that the results of our molecular diagnostic tests are meaningful and reliable which helps keep patients safe and makes it easier for doctors to make good decisions. Adhering to established laboratory standards and accreditation criteria aids in creating an organized and dependable quality management system (Kubista et al., 2024). For advanced techniques such as next-generation sequencing

(NGS), quality management becomes even more important because both laboratory procedures and computer-based data analysis can influence the final result. The sequencing instruments, software, data-processing methods, and storage of genetic information must therefore be carefully monitored. Diagnostic interpretation is about putting molecular test results with the patients medical history, symptoms and other test results. The clinical history and symptoms of the patient are crucial when we evaluate test results. So we need to understand the results in the medical context. The amount of material we find can be very helpful in some cases but it depends on the type of infection the sample we are testing and the patients situation. In testing we need to look at the variants we find and decide how important they are for the patients health. A test called NGS can find genetic variants so we need to be very careful when we look at the results and write our report. Digital PCR is a test that can measure small amounts of molecular targets, which is helpful for tracking changes in a disease. When we do a multiplex assay we can find many things at the same time so we need to be very careful when we analyze the results. Molecular test results and clinical data are both important, for making a diagnosis. In the end we need to have laboratory tests and combine molecular results with clinical data in a thoughtful way to get the right diagnosis. The patients molecular test results are one part of the diagnostic interpretation and we need to consider the patients clinical history and symptoms when we interpret the molecular test results. Another important aspect is quantitative interpretation, where the amount of a molecular target is measured rather than simply reporting it as positive or negative. Effective laboratory quality management is something that needs to be done all the time. It helps make sure that the results from testing are correct the same every time and helpful for patients. Every part of the process from getting the sample to giving the report needs to be watched. If mistakes happen at any point it can hurt the care that patients get. Regular training for the people who work in the lab keeping records making sure the machines are working right checking the quality and fixing problems quickly all help stop mistakes and make people more sure about the test results. When doctors look at the results from the lab they also need to remember what each test can. Cannot do. There is always a chance of getting the result either saying something is there when it is not or missing something that is there. When lab results are used along with what doctors see in patients and other tests healthcare workers can make choices, about diagnosing, treating and watching patients.

5. CHALLENGES , COST AND ACCESSIBILITY

5.1. Challenges

While molecular diagnostics are developing rapidly, there are several challenges to its routine use in clinical laboratory medicine. The molecular diagnostic techniques usually require expensive reagents, advanced laboratory equipment, trained workers and specialized equipment. The complexity of sample preparation, nucleic acid extraction, amplification, sequencing and data interpretation may require regular staff training and can increase the risk of technical errors. Molecular diagnostics has a lot of problems. The main issues with diagnostics are that it costs a lot of money to buy the equipment for molecular diagnostics. The things you need to run the tests for diagnostics called reagents for molecular diagnostics are also very expensive. You need to have a place to do the molecular diagnostics and people who know what they are doing with molecular diagnostics. It is also hard to make sense of the results from the diagnostics. These problems with diagnostics are even worse in places that do not have a lot of money or resources for molecular diagnostics. In these places you might not always have

electricity, for the molecular diagnostics equipment (Thapliyal et al., 2024). You might not have a place to store the things you need for molecular diagnostics. You might not be able to take care of the molecular diagnostics equipment.. You might not always be able to get the things you need to run the tests for molecular diagnostics (Okeke & Ihekweazu, 2021). These problems are even worse in places that do not have resources. Some laboratories might deal with electricity that goes out all the time. Other laboratories might have small spaces, bad storage areas or a hard time getting the reagents and other important materials they need. In areas getting from one place to another is a struggle and transportation problems can slow down the delivery of samples and laboratory supplies. Because of these issues patients living in resource-limited regions might not get testing as easily as patients, in well-developed healthcare systems (Thapliyal et al. 2024).

5.2. Cost

Another major challenge is cost, especially for countries with low or middle incomes. High initial equipment costs as well as continuous costs for reagents, maintenance, software, and data storage may be related to advanced technologies such as next-generation sequencing, digital PCR, and comprehensive genomic testing. The availability of advanced molecular testing can be further limited by insufficient laboratory infrastructure and erratic access to essential supplies. Cost-effective molecular platforms and decentralized testing may help address some of these problems. Point-of-care systems can reduce the need to transport specimens to distant laboratories, while multiplex assays can potentially provide several results from a single specimen. Cost-effective technologies can help improve the situation. Point-of-care molecular tests, multiplex assays, and portable diagnostic platforms can reduce some laboratory and transportation requirements. Multiplex testing can also provide information about several targets from a single patient specimen, which may make testing more efficient.

5.3. Accessibility

Molecular diagnostics are affected by where people live and how money they have (Thapliyal et al., 2024). Big hospitals and specialized laboratories usually have the machines for diagnostics but people in rural areas and places with limited resources may not be able to get to these services (Ewalt & Hsiao, 2024). We can use tests that can be done right where the patient is and machines that are easy to move around to help solve this problem. These machines can do tests without needing a lot of equipment so we can use them in more places. To make molecular diagnostics available to everyone we need to make the technology cheaper. Make sure labs have what they need. We also need to teach healthcare workers how to use the machines and make sure we have systems in place to check the quality of the tests. Molecular diagnostics companies, laboratories, hospitals and governments need to work to make the tests cheaper and available, to more people. This is important so that everyone can get the benefits of diagnostics and have personalized healthcare (Rodino & Simner, 2024). Molecular diagnostics can be very helpful. Only if everyone can get to them (Elvin, 2024). Putting money into laboratory infrastructure training staff, checking quality building supply chains and providing affordable technologies can bring molecular diagnostics to more people. Ensuring accessibility is vital because the advantages of molecular diagnostics can only be fully reached when patients, from many places and different economic levels can use these services (Elvin, 2024).

6. FUTURE PERSPECTIVES IN PRECISION LABORATORY MEDICINE

AI and Machine Learning Integration:

Machine Learning Integration is really important (Master et al., 2023; Albahra et al., 2023). It helps in the laboratory by making it easier to identifying signals (Hou et al., 2024). It also helps to make sense of complex molecular diagnostic data. This integration also helps to predict when things might go wrong so we can fix them before they do (Cadamuro et al., 2023).

Decentralized point-of-care (POC):

This means we can do tests in places where we do not have a lot of equipment or money (Ghouneimy et al., 2023). We can use platforms to test for things like nucleic acid and it is very cost effective (Sahel et al., 2024).

Changing professional roles:

The roles of professionals are changing. With increasing laboratory automation professionals will need to develop skills like how to give advice to patients and how to work with others to understand data. They also need to learn about healthcare that is based on value, which means we get the care, for our money. Machine Learning Integration and automation are really changing the way laboratory professionals work.

Laboratory Automation:

Automation can reduce repetitive manual work and improve laboratory efficiency. Automated molecular workflows can improve reproducibility, turnaround time, and quality. The combination of automation, digitalization, and AI may lead toward highly integrated or “hyperautomated” laboratories (Kubista et al., 2024).

Accessibility and Equitable Healthcare:

New molecular diagnostic technologies that are coming up need to focus on results and being affordable as well as being easy to reach. Reducing the costs of machines and running them can help bring testing to places that don't have much money. Training people, building the structures having enough supplies and making sure everything is done properly will be very important, for making this work over time.

Personalized and Precision Medicine:

Molecular diagnostics will help doctors pick the treatments based on the unique genetic and molecular traits of each patient. This helps make treatments work better. It also stops people from using medicines that might not work for a patient.

Advanced Biomarker Detection:

New diagnostic technologies might find biomarkers soon. These biomarkers can help find diseases earlier. Finding a disease early helps doctors start treatment quickly and watch how the disease changes.

Integration of Multi-Omics Data:

When we mix information from genomics, transcriptomics, proteomics and other molecular ways we get a view of a disease. This helps laboratories see how diseases work. It also helps doctors make exact clinical decisions.

Data Security and Ethical Considerations:

Molecular testing creates a lot of genetic information. Because of this protecting the privacy of a patient is very important. We will need data security. We also need to use information in a responsible way and follow clear ethical guidelines.

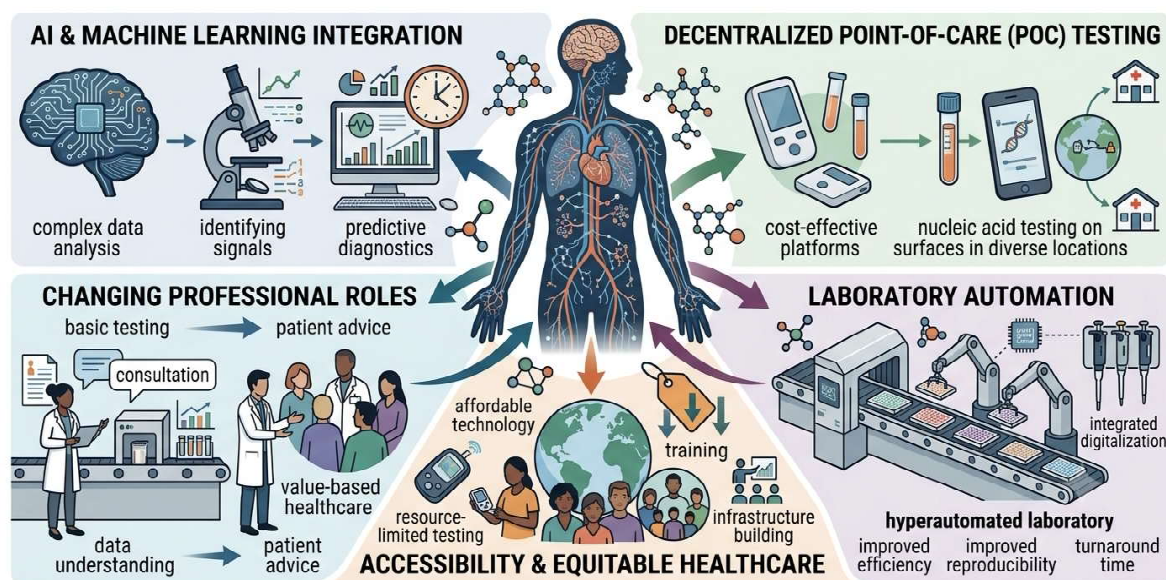


Fig 2: Future perspectives in precision laboratory medicine. Future laboratory medicine will focus on personalized diagnosis and treatment using genomics, AI, automation, and advanced molecular tests. These technologies will enable earlier disease detection, accurate risk assessment, and better treatment decisions.

7. CONCLUSION

Already now the use of diagnostic technologies in human genetics and virology has changed how clinical diagnostics are done in these areas. The number of tests in clinical bacteriology has gone up steadily over the last ten years. Although traditional microbiological methods will not be replaced in the near future but using array-based detection technologies or rapid real-time PCR are increasingly being used for the identification of clinically important pathogens is becoming common in labs today (Schmitz et al., 2022). As automation increase and the costs of microbiology go down these tools will become more available in regular laboratories (Yadav et al., 2023). Along with progress in microfluidics the future clearly shows a trend toward complex tests on small and automated lab-on-a-chip devices, which are also efficient ,for point-of-care testing (Kubista et al., 2024). In general molecular diagnostics is changing the way clinical laboratories work. It gives exact and reliable ways to find diseases and keep track of them. Improvements in automation, artificial intelligence, sequencing, microfluidics and testing at the point of care are expected to make diagnosis better easier to get and more suited to each patient. Molecular diagnostics is very important, in clinical laboratory medicine. It has changed how we find and follow illnesses .Unlike methods molecular techniques can find specific genetic material

and molecular changes with great accuracy and speed. This is often done faster than before. Technologies such as PCR, real-time PCR, digital PCR generation sequencing and CRISPR-based tests have greatly improved the ability of clinical labs to diagnose diseases. Molecular diagnostics is especially helpful in diagnosing diseases, cancer and genetic conditions. Fast molecular testing helps us find pathogens and certain signs of resistance which allows us to make treatment decisions quickly. Molecular testing and liquid biopsy in cancer diagnosis give us information about genetic changes how well treatment is working and how the disease is progressing. Similarly advancements in sequencing technologies have improved the diagnosis of disorders by allowing us to analyze many genes at the same time. However using molecular diagnostics also has some limitations. The high cost of equipment and materials the need for workers, complex data analysis and inadequate laboratory facilities can make it hard to use these technologies especially in places with limited resources (Master et al., 2023). Therefore it is crucial to have quality control validate laboratory methods and ensure that samples are collected and processed properly to get accurate results (Hou et al., 2024). Molecular diagnostics, like PCR and next-generation sequencing must be used carefully to get the results (Sahel et al., 2024).

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