



Interview with Nelson Vergel, Founder, DiscountedLabs.com

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Interview Transcript

Robert Nicholson:

Hello everyone. I'm Robert Nicholson with the *ED Treatment Information Center*. Today, I'm talking with Nelson Vergel, founder of DiscountedLabs.com, a website that allows you to get your medical lab work done at a significant savings. Welcome Nelson.

Nelson Vergel:

Hi, Robert. How are you doing?

Robert Nicholson:

Good. Good. So, Nelson, companies always have an origin story. Can you tell me what the motivation was for DiscountedLabs.com and how you got started?

Nelson Vergel:

Yeah. Thanks for asking the question. Yes, in my case, it was pretty obvious. I've been in the hormone replacement field for around 30 years or so. And eventually I realized that in hormone replacement, not only we need to monitor our hormone levels depending on what we're doing, testosterone, thyroid, et cetera. But we have to do so in a frequency sometimes because we're changing doses or optimizing, that is not approved by insurance companies. Meaning, even if you have insurance, if you're doing a testosterone test more than twice a year for instance, many insurance companies would deny payment for that test. Not because [inaudible 00:01:21] there's anything wrong with the test, it's because of the frequency, okay. And also started realizing that most

doctors obviously do not know and it's not their job, to know what's included and what's not included in an insurance policy.

Nelson Vergel:

So therefore, I was getting a lot of surprised lab bills, invoices, from LabCorp and Quest, depending on what I was using. Months after, I got my blood work done and the doctor assumed that it would be covered, right. So, that's where we are finding in the past few years that many people, even with the insurance, are getting surprised by really high bills four months after the fact and they're stuck with this bill that obviously they were assuming that insurance was going to pay. So, that was a first flag for me because obviously when you are optimizing a dosage protocol for any hormones or non hormones, I'm just talking about hormones because that's really where I started in this whole field. And I started realizing that having insurance did not guarantee payment for lab work. And, or the frequency of lab work, even cholesterol, Medicare doesn't pay for more than every three months, if you're lucky, every six months release frequency that they allow.

Nelson Vergel:

So, if you're taking statin and changing the dose, or just switch medications, you will be left with a surprise bill if you don't take matters in your own hands. So, that's when I realized, and this very learning that consumers in United States also have a lot more power than in most countries. Obviously, everybody discusses and argues about how horrible our healthcare system is. And obviously, there's so many problems, as we all know. But what's something that we do have in this country is a lot more flexibility for a consumer to access, not only lab testing, but even imaging testing that as long as you pays cash, you're paying self pay, you can get really discounted prices that are even lower than most copays that you would pay through an insurance company.

Nelson Vergel:

So, I think consumers were getting more and more educated. And I reached out, I started looking for lab tests, testosterone or thyroid, online. And there were a few companies where they were charging a lot of money also, if you want to buy your own lab test online. So, that's when I realized, it is time and most of my audience, I have a large audience in a hormone field, men and women. I have another website, ExcelMale.com, where over 45,000 guys all over the world are chatting every day about

their hormone balance and the low hormone tests. So then also they started like pushing me, “Nelson, please do something about this issue of access and pricing and let us take charge of our own health without having to go broke.”

So that was really the motivator for me.

Nelson Vergel:

And obviously it took me a while to get a deal because I definitely, I worked with Quest Diagnostics. I used to work with Lab Corp. So I'm basically kind of a broker and a consumer educator. That not only sales and lab test, but also educates people what the lab test mean? How you can talk to your doctor about it and all that. We provide also the physician prescription. So you don't have to go see a doctor for getting... Buying your own lab test. However, some people may need a doctor after they get the results, which we email to them. And they started getting worried about, “Hey, I'm too high, I'm too low. What am I going to do?”

And they need a doctor. So we also take care of that side. We can refer people to doctors around the United States, to get some treatment after they see their results. And they start getting concerned about the fact that they need treatment.

Robert Nicholson:

Great. Great. Yeah. And I'm going to get back to that in just a minute. We... You talked about cost being one of the original motivators. The fact that this is not covered by insurance and, labs are charging a lot of money. I assume you've negotiated some broker deals. And how does your pricing compare to what someone would pay if they walk in off the street or if their doctor refers them?

Nelson Vergel:

Well, that's a good question. I mean, my brand, my company is called Discounted Labs, or, you can also say Discount Labs because I also own the brand. So the brand says, “All right, I'm promising by just the brand name.”

That I'm providing discounted prices. So I'm probably one of the lowest cost providers in the online direct to consumer lab testing field. I'm doing on purpose keeping my margins very low, so that people can access. I could make, obviously a lot more profit, but I would not be a Discounted Labs company, which is really the... My point was to

increase access and self-empowerment. I have seen it all. I've seen people that forward their surprise bills, right?

Robert Nicholson:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nelson Vergel:

That for instance, for a panel, because we... I not only sell single tests, obviously, like a testosterone test, but I sell what we call panels, which are bundles of different tests that I create depending on the condition.

Nelson Vergel:

And I have been around for 30 years. So I know more or less what doctors are prescribing as a bundle, meaning you have testosterone sex hormone binding globulin, bioavailable testosterone, thyroid sometimes say they combine thyroid because the symptoms seem very similar, low testosterone, low thyroid. So I created different bundles for men on testosterone replacement, bundles for women that are pre-menopausal, bundles for women that are post-menopausal. So when I'm trying to say that bundle, basically I've seen a change for instance, I can... My prices are around 20% or less of what you would be charged in a surprise bill later on by any of the lab testing companies. Okay. So it is a substantial savings. And in many cases, as I say, would be even lower than the 20% copay that some insurance policies have. So yeah, so I'm very proud of that.

Nelson Vergel:

I really believe, and I have enough evidence to say that I was a market disruptor when I came in several years ago. Most of the companies that compete against my company were really, their margins were incredibly high. And I saw 2021, we definitely can say everybody's lower their prices. So I'm proud of that. I think that's a big accomplishment to be the market disruptor for pricing. Because there's still enough margin to be made, but obviously at my small company with lower overheads. So I can transfer that savings to the patients.

Robert Nicholson:

That's great. That's great. So how are your patients coming to you? Are doctors referring them? Or are you promoting this through excelmale.com? How do they find you?

Nelson Vergel:

It's a very interesting question. I think finding, oh, well, it's been seven years that most people... I said met with somebody on a plane, for instance, or, I'm just having a chat at a party, right. And people say, "What do you do for a living?"

And I start explaining what my company does. And they looked at me and said, "I didn't know, you could do that. Really? I didn't know you could buy your own lab tests."

Almost 99%. So, my biggest challenge as a marketing guy, because obviously I have to market, I do my own marketing too. And educational stuff, writing articles and all that. Is to tell people, "Hey, you can do this. And you don't have to go see a doctor. You can do it online, like you buy a pair of shoes in Amazon."

And that has been the biggest challenge.

Nelson Vergel:

Obviously, just letting people know that you can. People don't know for instance. And I know there are example outside the blood testing field. That your doctor prescribes a CT scan, and they want to charge you a copay of \$400. And you can buy a CT scan for \$250, out of pocket. Less than your copay. So as I said, there many options in the United States, is the only country that has this. Where a self-pay patient or consumer has... Can shop around and actually beat the copays of insurance. And obviously if you don't have insurance is somewhat subject, where you're going to save something. So, that is my biggest thing. How do I do that? How do I bring people besides you talking to him on a plane or a party? I have a platform called excelmale.com. That's a men's health platform. It's 11 years old.

Nelson Vergel:

Obviously there are people. I educate people and guys on the bundles and what you can do. I have a group on Facebook, two groups; one for men, called Testosterone Replacement Discussion that has 20,000 men. Obviously there, I have a group for

women, Women's Health and HRT on Facebook. Probably 7,000 women. So I do it by outreach, within networks that I created. Because obviously those people are coming to those platforms, seeking information. They're really a little bit ahead of the regular consumer. They're more educated. That's why they find those platforms, forums and groups. So there, that's the easiest way obviously. I don't even have to pay for that marketing because really that's... I'm actually moderating those platforms and the regular Google ads and all the other things that most companies do. But I have to say the biggest marketing is obviously something every company has to do.

Nelson Vergel:

But in my case, I have to also educate patients that, "Yes, you can do this. And yes, this is not a gimmick. And yes, this is."

It is... The testing is the same test you get [inaudible 00:11:51] doctor's office. The same companies. The same CDC certified because of the CDC, the Center for Disease Control, actually standardizes and certifies all these companies. Making sure that people are doing there the right lab testing and the right mythology. So it's yeah. It's... But I'm lucky because I have platforms, consumer platforms that all my competitors don't have. Because I come from the world of, that world for the networking world. My background is really in HIV and that's my own personal, anybody can Google my name, but, I've HIV positive for 37 years. And I had cancer six years ago too. So I was also getting hit with different lab testing avails back then.

Nelson Vergel:

So I've been... My health challenges, even I'm 62 also. Have opened my eyes that... If you're lucky enough and people have been a pretty criticized is, to live in the United States, you have options beyond just accepting the limitations of insurance and their opinions on what's reimbursable or not. Leaving that decision up to your doctor is dangerous because doctors really do not know what's covered and what's not. They learn after a few years when they start getting their patients to complain, "Hey, you prescribed this and I had to pay myself."

So, that's how they learn. But so yeah, it's marketing and educating people. My site has a blog where I publish every week articles about different lab tests and what they mean. Men are very concerned about estrogen and women are concerned about testosterone,

believe it or not having high testosterone. So it's all about myths and a lot of myths and misconceptions out there, especially when it comes to hormone levels, which is where you get [inaudible 00:13:51] my strongest niche.

Robert Nicholson:

Now you touched on something very important there, I know that when my doctor prescribes lab tests and I get the test results. And then I have to sit down with my doctor and have him explain them because I get a bunch of numbers and I really don't know what they mean. Do you provide educational information or ways to help people understand the test results of the packages that they're getting?

Nelson Vergel:

Yes. Well, first of all, I have to clarify that my company does not provide medical advice. We have doctors, obviously I have doctors in my board that have to approve what we call any critical values. For instance, if somebody comes back, their results come back with a very low blood sugar, very high blood sugar, or low potassium, for instance, right? Life-threatening. There're life-threatening values, obviously that are flagged by Quest Diagnostics or LabCorp. And we are sent an alert, "Hey, we just tested this. This is critical. The patient has to be contacted."

Nelson Vergel:

So we have on our board, over 14 physicians that have licensing in 34 states... 32 states, we have right now. They need two states. We don't serve New York, New Jersey and Rhode Island because they have legislation there that does not allow direct to consumer lab companies like ours... Like myself... Like mine. But, and when it comes to critical values, we do contact them through the doctor. The patient that bought, or the consumer that bought the test to alert them that they need to go to a primary care doctor right away to get whatever issue is.

Nelson Vergel:

That's what we call critical value allotting. When it comes to just general information, we do send, when we send results, we send resources like the blog articles, where they can search their lab tests that they're actually getting information about. And we also, as I said, offer the referrals... A referral system to clinics. So they can make more sense of their lab testing. So that's a good question. We are limited on providing medical

advice because obviously that's something we don't do. We're about to add, I'm working on that right now, menu item for people to purchase lab interpretation session. With a nurse or a PA, in some cases because MDs usually are busy doing other things. So it is legal, obviously in this country more than clinically justified, for a clinician, [inaudible 00:16:38] a nurse practitioner or a PA, to do that. So we're about to add that menu item so that people that may feel they would like to have a 20 minute discussion on Zoom, with a clinician to discuss.

Robert Nicholson:

Wow, that's a great idea.

Nelson Vergel:

Thank you.

Robert Nicholson:

So you touched on this earlier, but I want to come back to it because I think it's very important. You are working with established testing companies. You don't have a chemistry set in your back room. So consumers know that they can trust these test results because they're working with labs that are monitored and certified by government agencies. Is that correct? Can you elaborate on that a little?

Nelson Vergel:

Quest Diagnostics is the second largest lab network in the country after LabCorp and the Center for Disease Control has CLIA- Clinic Laboratory Improvement Amendment is called. So a law that basically makes them responsible for testing, standardizing, making sure that all of these companies are providing a lab test value that is close to what reality should be. So, and that they do that every year. They actually spot test them. The FDA sometimes does it with drugs, for instance, just [inaudible 00:18:04] sure that they're following standard practices. So that usually people know their brand Quest Diagnostics or LabCorp, it's not like they're not known. Most of the time you know because that's what comes back when you get a surprise bill or your doctor [inaudible 00:18:20]. So most doctors either use LabCorp or Quest. And we are using Quest Diagnostics right now.

Nelson Vergel:

I like Quest in particular because Quest has a beautiful reporting system in which you provide to the consumer a graph of the lab test values. Especially if you have done the testing before. So you actually can see you in a color graph where your cholesterol has been or your testosterone. And that really helps. That's something that only Quest has. So there's a visual trend that a patient can see. What's happening with the internet as you well know, we had come from the days where the internet was not available. So you have to go through our library. But see the internet has provided us as consumers information. You can search a low testosterone, high testosterone, thyroid hormone levels, and you'll find a lot of information on the ranges and what they mean and all that. That has really empowered consumers to know what to expect and educate themselves about every lab testing.

Nelson Vergel:

So I think this whole thing on direct to consumer, especially in lab testing, has come at that age where we have what, 25, 30 years of Google searches. They are educating people. And usually the people that come to sites like mine are educated. They have done a little bit of research on their condition, on their... Most of them already have a physician. They're just doing this self-monitoring because they already know more or less what to look for. They're changing doses, as I said, a statin or testosterone treatment, or females are taking obviously estrogen, progesterone creams and all that. So they are people that frequently monitor their blood work. I would say 90% of the customers are self-empowered, self-educated, have done a lot of reading. They do testing on their cells every three to six months.

Nelson Vergel:

They know their trends. It's a highly educated patient population. And the testing is not expensive. You can check your cholesterol, your lipids for \$24. And I think insurance company will probably charge close to \$400 for the same test, right? So that's really where the striking thing happens. So you can check your blood sugar and your liver function, kidney function for \$26. So people, once they find that, that is a big if. Once somebody finds out that you can do this, in this country without breaking any laws, it's not illegal. That's the biggest hurdle I have in reaching out to people. They know really this can be done really. And how does this work? Well, you just go online and buy with a credit card. You get a lab request, a form that you download and print.

Nelson Vergel:

You take that form to the closest Quest Diagnostics lab. They take your blood. And a few days later you get an email, under it saying, "Hey, here are your results. And here are your results. Click here if you want to find out more about what they mean and click here, if you need a doctor."

So, that's what we do. So it's a very fulfilling thing for me. I have to say this, I've done many things in my life [inaudible 00:22:05] I think this is close to increasing access to people. Access to health is my goal. Is my mission. All companies... I'm about to launch hormone clinic directory also, where people can search their doctors close to their area that can treat, not only men or women with testosterone, thyroid, et cetera, et cetera. So, and believe it or not, there is no such a thing in the world right now. You would think there is. We can... You have directories for everything. So that's something else that is going to increase access to treatment. And as I said, that's my goal in life, every company to follow that mission.

Robert Nicholson:

That's great. That's great. Is there anything else you'd like to share about Discounted Labs?

Nelson Vergel:

Well, yeah. We provide a resource tab there. I have, I wrote an illustrated book, 400 pages on testosterone for men offering it there for free. So that's, even if you don't buy any lab testing, I would really love for people to have the free book. It's a download. It's a PDF file. We also focus a lot and this is something that most consumers don't know. Like for instance, testosterone, let's use testosterone as an example. There are two types of testosterone tests. The ECLA test, basic immunoassay is the cheapest test. And it's pretty precise. Is why it's being used for many years. But it doesn't do very well when the testosterone levels are very low or very high. So there's another assay called liquid chromatography, mass spectrometry based. You pay probably 7, 8 dollars more, and it's very precise.

Nelson Vergel:

It can test very low levels of testosterone and very high levels, which happens when somebody is overdosing, obviously. And it also does not present any interactions. For

instance, there's a hair loss supplement that many men are taking or women, or biotene. Biotene, it's over the counter. It can affect the results of immunoassays like thyroid testing. So this liquid chromatography assay does not have interactions like that. So I focus on that type of assays. Why? Because this is the most precise. It really, it's only around six, seven years old.

Nelson Vergel:

The technology is a little more expensive, but you are sure you're getting the right value. Because even though the CDC checks and standardizes it's companies, assays have improve... Assay technology has improved to be more precise. And, so that's something that most, I would say most men or women don't know, that there's only one type of technology to measure a hormone level [crosstalk 00:25:05] at least two and I'm not saying their whole technology is bad. It's just, it is cheaper if you have a financial restrictions. But liquid chromatography is now the gold standard. And a lot of companies out there are not really differentiating them or even explaining what that means. And I think I do a better job at that too.

Robert Nicholson:

That's great. That's amazing. Well, this has been very educational. I have to admit, I did not know until I saw one of your posts on Facebook. I didn't know that direct to consumer testing was something that was available. So, I'm one of those people that would have been sitting next to you on the plane, getting the explanation.

Nelson Vergel:

[inaudible 00:25:47] the right to consumer now, especially in your field, on ED, people are having direct to consumer, obviously companies that provide ED meds online and you've seen all of them I'm sure the apps and all that. And there's that right to consumer. Obviously, like I said, before, imaging. That you can buy CT or X-ray for a discount price. They're direct to consumer, obviously now Telemedicine apps, where if you're having a cold or something, you can see a doctor from your home and get a prescription sent to their closest pharmacy. So this thing, obviously that happened before COVID, but I think COVID has made all this explode and accelerate the access from home to, in many ways. So in a way that COVID has been the worst thing that's happened to, obviously us in many ways. But this also, that's one of the good things that

is coming from this quarantine that we've gone through and people still needed access to a healthcare somehow.

Robert Nicholson:

Oh, I agree. I agree. All right, Nelson. Well, thank you very much. Been really informative and I'm sure my audience is going to be very excited about trying out Discountws Labs.

Nelson Vergel:

Thanks for having me, Robert, you have a nice Memorial Day weekend.

Robert Nicholson:

Well, that's it for this time. If you have questions or topics you'd like to see us cover, use the contact form on our website. Till next time. Bye.

About Nelson Vergel

Nelson Vergel is the founder of DiscountedLabs.com and ExcelMale.com.

He is the author of "Testosterone: A Man's Guide," and co-author of "Built to Survive: The Clinical Use of Anabolic Steroids for HIV+ Men and Women."

He has been a member of several U.S. National Institute of Health (NIH) and pharmaceutical advisory groups, as well as FDA review panels.

Nelson also founded the non-profit organizations *Body Positive Wellness Clinic* and *Program for Wellness Restoration* in Houston, providing health education and wellness services to HIV+ people.

About EDtreatment.info

The *ED Treatment Information Center* provides information, resources, help and support for erectile dysfunction sufferers and their partners.

We post authoritative information on the causes and treatment of erectile dysfunction. Where ever possible, we include references and citations to clinical research to support the information we provide.

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