Quest Diagnostics Announces Improved HEPTIMAX Hepatitis C Viral Load Test, First to Use Roche Diagnostics' TaqMan Real-Time PCR Technology

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TETERBORO, N.J., Mar 1, 2002 /PRNewswire-FirstCall via COMTEX/ -- Quest Diagnostics Incorporated (NYSE: DGX), the nation's leader in gene-based medical testing, announced a newly improved version of its ultra-sensitive HEPTIMAX(TM) hepatitis C viral load test using Roche Diagnostics' COBAS TaqMan(R) platform. Quest Diagnostics is the first laboratory to use the state-of-the-art testing system to determine and report patient results, which will speed the turnaround time for hepatitis C viral load testing. HEPTIMAX testing offers physicians the convenience of ordering one test for all their hepatitis C viral load testing needs.

The ultra-sensitive HEPTIMAX HCV viral load test is capable of detecting minute quantities of hepatitis C virus down to as few as 5 international units per milliliter (IU/ml). The ability to detect minute quantities of virus is useful to physicians in monitoring the effectiveness of various treatments for hepatitis C in patients. The HEPTIMAX HCV viral load test not only delivers the maximum sensitivity but also offers the maximum range (5 IU/ml to greater than 50 million IU/ml). This improved assay will be available to Quest Diagnostics' customers beginning in March.

Quest Diagnostics acquired the real-time PCR technology under its recently announced alliance with Roche Diagnostics to develop and commercialize new gene-based medical tests utilizing Roche Diagnostics' patented polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technology, which is recognized as the gold standard for gene-based testing and an important enabling technology for applied genomics. The Roche Diagnostics' TaqMan testing platform enables Quest Diagnostics to provide one-day turnaround for the vast majority of infected patients by using "real-time PCR," compared to up to three days using previous methods. The TaqMan system is fully automated and provides higher sensitivity than earlier generations of PCR testing.

In addition, the ultra-sensitive HEPTIMAX HCV test utilizes reagents and proprietary transcription-mediated amplification (TMA) technology from Bayer Diagnostics, made available through Bayer's exclusive agreement with Gen-Probe, San Diego, CA. TMA allows for the amplification and detection of genetic material in plasma or serum samples.

The improved HEPTIMAX test is the latest addition to Quest Diagnostics' comprehensive test menu for hepatitis C disease management. Quest Diagnostics provides a complete selection of tests for initial diagnosis, treatment monitoring and managing HCV infected patients. The menu also features the DupliType(TM) HCV genotype test, which helps physicians establish the appropriate duration of HCV therapy.

An estimated 4 million people are infected with hepatitis C virus in the United States, and approximately 130,000 patients currently receive treatment. Physicians monitor viral loads in infected patients to test the effectiveness of various types of combination therapies.

About Quest Diagnostics

Quest Diagnostics Incorporated is the nation's leading provider of diagnostic testing, information and services, providing insights that enable physicians, hospitals, managed care organizations and other healthcare professionals to make decisions to improve health. The company offers the broadest access to diagnostic laboratory testing services through its national network of laboratories and patient service centers. Quest Diagnostics is the leading provider of esoteric testing, including gene-based medical testing, and empowers healthcare organizations and clinicians with state-of-the-art connectivity solutions that improve practice management. Additional company information can be found on the Internet at: http://www.questdiagnostics.com.

The statements in this press release that are not historical facts or information may be forward-looking statements. These forward-looking statements involve risks and uncertainties that could cause the outcome to be materially different. Certain of these risks and uncertainties are listed in the Quest Diagnostics Incorporated 2000 Form 10-K and subsequent filings.

COBAS TaqMan(TM) is a registered trademark of Roche Diagnostics. HEPTIMAX(TM) and DupliType(TM) are trademarks of Quest Diagnostics Incorporated.

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