Utilising Technology on a Global Scale

Kyle Cunningham at Greenphire reveals how technology trends are transforming the clinical trial lifecycle by alleviating administrative and logistical burdens in research

According to the FDA, clinical research has become increasingly complex on a global scale. For sponsors looking to improve operational efficiencies, technology can introduce much-needed transparency while improving the overall site and patient experience.

***ICT:* What are some of the logistical challenges that sites, sponsors, and CROs face in clinical trials taking place in various countries?**

Kyle Cunningham: Even though conducting a clinical trial on a global scale is often a research necessity, it can certainly add logistical challenges for all stakeholders. As trials become more complex and patient populations become increasingly diversified, the reality is that study participants must often travel greater distances and spend more time at clinics than ever before.

For individual study participants, a clinical trial can provide much-needed access to innovative drugs or treatment options. However, the sheer act of getting to a clinic across long distances when an individual may not be in optimal health can create severe hardships for participants. Managing the logistics of travel and out-of-pocket hotel costs, trains, and planes can be too much for some clinical trial participants, families, and caretakers to handle. In fact, it can be a top reason as to why patients drop out of a trial or do not participate at all.

For clinical trial sites, acting as a travel agent or payment coordinator takes away from delivering on their core mission: conducting clinical research and providing compassionate care to study participants. However, sites understand that, as more personalised treatments are introduced, participants may need to come from further away and incur expenses to do so. That said, it is becoming increasingly important for sites to find and implement meaningful solutions that streamline patient travel and reimbursement services.

In addition to the barriers and burdens that both clinical research sites and the patients face, study sponsors are presented with their own specific set of challenges when conducting global studies. Meaningful data is often limited or disparate, making it extremely difficult to understand, predict, and control costs. Transparency, predictability, and control for enterprise sponsors are a consistent challenge.

Kyle Cunningham leads the strategic direction of product development as Chief Product Officer, ensuring that Greenphire solutions are constantly evolving to address client needs. He works closely with sales and IT to understand the evolving clinical trial landscape and works to identify how to align the product roadmap to ensure the company stays ahead of the curve.

Kyle has more than two decades of experience in product strategy, product and project management, relationship management, and operations management. Prior to joining Greenphire, Kyle worked for SEI Investments company, where he focused on product and service strategy for international investment processing and management.

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How can technologies lessen these pain points? What are some of these technologies?

Identifying the key pain points faced by clinical trial stakeholders, from patients and sites to sponsors and CROs, is critical in developing solutions to these issues and improving clinical trial research.

With numerous studies conducted across the globe and individual research sites conducting, on average, more than 21 studies at a time, maintaining efficiency and standardisation is a challenge. This is where technologies designed specifically to address clinical trial processes can play a monumental role. By streamlining and automating workflows such as clinical trial payments and participant travel, software solutions can reduce the administrative burden on sites, introduce added convenience for participants, and provide financial and workflow visibility to sponsors and CROs.

Ultimately, these specialised technologies improve process efficiencies for all stakeholders and enable standardisation across the study.

What are the risks when it comes to participant payments in clinical trials?

Clinical trial participants are sacrificing their bodies and personal time to help in the development of treatments that may offer better healthcare for themselves and others. For this commitment, participants should be reimbursed and/or paid a reasonable stipend in a timely manner via a convenient method.

If compensation is not provided expeditiously, the risk of a patient dropping out of a trial increases. After all, many individuals cannot afford to travel to a clinic, spend time away from work, and then wait for payment. However, using cash or cheques can present risks to both the participant and the research site.

If an individual receives cash from a study visit and loses it, it is gone forever. On the other hand, getting a cheque offers some protection, but assumes that a clinical trial participant has a chequing account; otherwise, the individual must incur fees to have a cheque cashed. For sites, cheques provide somewhat of a paper trail, but the increased costs and administrative headaches can be subject to fraud. This is a top concern that sites do not have time for.

In today's digital age, consumers are increasingly steering clear of cash and cheques in favour of debit cards and cashless technology. Using a reloadable debit card or direct deposit system provides extra security for the patient and is as easy to use as cash. These methods offer quick and simple fund distribution for site staff while enhancing financial transparency for sponsors.

From your perspective, what trends currently impact clinical trials the most?

We are in a time of great medical discovery, with a surge in biopharmaceutical clinical trials. Globally, clinical trial sponsors, CROs, and sites are under pressure to meet patient recruitment and retention goals to ensure a successful clinical trial.

However, the Tufts Center for the Study of Drug Development has long documented that sites that do not enrol enough patients, have delayed study timelines, and, in some circumstances, fail altogether. While there are many reasons for study failure, the patient costs and logistics of participating in a clinical trial are often cited as key contributors.

We see a heightened interest from sponsors to offer solutions that remove barriers from clinical trial sites and patients to both increase enrolment and show compassion to study participants.

By continuing to analyse the full clinical trial lifecycle, we can identify future opportunities for product innovation, which are all aimed at improving the patient and site experience. Recruitment and retention start with eliminating the barriers to patient participation – namely timely compensation and specialised travel. Removing administrative burden for site personnel allows them to focus on research and participant care.

While improving the patient and site experience may be the primary objective, sponsors also benefit when introducing end-to-end payment technology and travel solutions. Streamlining processes brings together fragmented data from different stakeholders and systems, providing the sponsor with a holistic view of the finances associated with a research study. Only with this level of technology-enabled transparency can a sponsor accurately see their complete financial picture (including spend against budget) and begin to predict and plan future clinical research study costs and associated activities needed to succeed on a global scale.