Build a Road, Not a Roadblock — What Sites Want Sponsors To Know

A look at the pros and cons of clinical trial technology and its implementation, based on the experiences of sites that use it every single day.

Their message is loud and clear — technology has the potential to be a site's best friend, but it's often a roadblock instead. That's just one of the many insights learned from the sites who participated in a thoughtful panel discussion focused on how they feel about the past, present, and future of clinical technology. So, without further ado, here's what sites want sponsors to know.

Reduce Sites' Burden — So They Can Focus on Patients

"Too much tech…too little integration!" panelists decried, emphasizing that the burden placed on site coordinators and study teams multiplies exponentially with every new portal they're forced to use. Some panelists noted it was like having a separate cell phone for each app they use.

Compounding this burden is the sometimes-frequent turnover of monitors and other site personnel who must be brought up to speed on every new piece of technology. To combat this, sites asked sponsors to push for creating standards among systems, a shared network, or other integrated solutions that would prevent sites from having to learn and log in to countless new portals.

Like integration, interoperability was a key feature praised by panelists. Sites stated that having all aspects of a trial connected in one system was a timesaver that reduced the administrative burdens of performing a clinical trial while also cutting down on the amount of administration and "back and forth emails."

Site payment systems were praised during the panel as one of the most critical technologies. One panelist described how stress relieving it was to have a portal that broke down incoming payments by patient and visit, stating that "knowing straight up what cash we're getting for the month allows us to build out our activities and enroll more patients." Site engagement technology was also applauded by panelists who liked receiving relevant, actionable, trial information while

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being acknowledged on the platform for their hard work.

Keep Systems Up to Date, Offer Support, and Involve Them

Sites emphasized the importance of keeping systems up to date, reporting high-frustration levels with systems that did not keep pace with the fluidity of new research practices and regulations. "It's very easy to see that the people who build these systems are not people who have to use them every day," a panelist said. They also bemoaned systems that did not keep up to date with technological trends, with multiple sites reporting that several portals require older versions of Microsoft's Internet Explorer (not the latest Edge browser) to function properly.

One recommendation was a dedicated support line or website where sites could share suggested improvements, best practices, and recommendations with sponsors and other users. But perhaps the biggest recommendation of the day, was that sponsors come and visit sites to brief and debrief, provide tips and best practices on using systems, and build a collaborative relationship that can influence technology adoption and improve study conduct going forward.

This recommendation was key in helping sites overcome any system shortcomings they had previously encountered.

Develop a Relationship

Panelists suggested sites should consider using CTMS, which were lauded for their flexibility, and effectiveness. Many sites stated it was a best practice to meet with sponsors ahead of time to fine-tune their systems to the trial's needs. "When sponsors have an idea of how a trial is going to run, and let us know in advance, we can set up the system and plan it out…that lets us have the best trial possible," stated one panelist.

Panelists were also enthusiastic about forming relationships with sponsors through pre-investigator meeting briefs, post-trial debriefs, and suggestions. This last point was emphasized by panelists who were happy to see when questions sent to sponsors were quickly answered and disseminated to the entire network through the portal. This was also helpful when they received answers to questions they hadn't thought of submitted by other sites.

However, elevated above all else, was the belief that sites, sponsors, and CROs form relationships. "I want a commitment, a partnership…not to be just told what to do" noted one panelist who praised sponsors who had taken a more collaborative approach. Another noted, "Sites are only as good as their coordinators. In this age of tech, develop your technology around making the coordinators life easier. Bring in the tech that improves our quality of life. And, most importantly, listen and collaborate. Don't dictate what we have to do!"

These sentiments summed up sites' views rather well — that a road built with technology and personal relationships has great potential to ease the journey of clinical trials. **PV**

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