Spotlight

Patient Participation

Regulatory, Other

Topic See All >

Clinical Trial Supply Chain

CRO/Sponsor

eClinical

EMA

FDA

Advertise
Contact Us
Editorial Contacts
Do Not Sell My Personal Information
Privacy Policy
Terms and Conditions

AN MJH life sciences BRAND

New Technologies Close the Recruitment Gap

September 15, 2014

Fred Gebhart

Applied Clinical Trials

Relevant Topics

A growing number of providers are adapting 21st century web-based and mobile tools to connect the corners, boost trial participation, and speed trial completion.

Newspaper ads, radio and television, posters, fliers, and other conventional patient recruitment strategies don't seem to work, producing familiar and depressing results. "Many patient recruitment companies are feeding patients into a system that does not work very well," said Paul Wicks, PhD, Vice President of Innovation at PatientsLikeMe.com, a patient community website that partners with trial sponsors to boost enrollment. "In today's world, it is about trial participation, not trial recruitment. The confluence of technology and patient engagement can upgrade the clinical trial experience and outcome."

The clinical trial process relies on a triad of stakeholders: patients, investigators, and trial sponsors/CROs. No single entity controls all three corners of the trial triangle and connecting the stakeholders is increasingly difficult. But a growing number of providers are adapting 21st century web-based and mobile tools to connect the corners, boost trial participation, and speed trial completion.

Multiple Targets, Multiple Approaches

Which tools are most appropriate? It depends on the audience.

"As technology advances, it needs to be utilized to connect with patients," said Joan Chambers, Chief Operating Officer of clinical trials information publisher CenterWatch. "Email, Twitter, Facebook, patient communities all have their place. But you can't forget that you still have patient populations that are not so tech savvy. You can't forget the traditional channels, but they are certainly less useful."

CenterWatch plays a central role in web-based electronic recruitment even though it does no direct patient recruitment. The company translates and transforms the wealth of trial recruitment information published at ClinicalTrials.gov into language that is understandable by nonclinical audiences.

“Our goal is to help CROs, patient recruiters, study centers and study sponsors get as much patient exposure as possible for their trials,” Chambers said. “There is no sign that patients as a whole are getting more likely to enroll in trials, but some trials are meeting their enrollment goals on time or even early by connecting more directly with patients. We are all looking for new models and strategies to provide better trial information to the patient community to meet sponsor enrollment goals.”

Other providers see the opportunity on the investigator side. DrugDev.org matches trial sponsors/CROs with would-be investigators and adds site management services to strengthen industry links.

“Sponsors always assumed that investigators would be there, but finding qualified investigators who are also interested is not that simple,” said CEO Ibraheem Mahmood. “We are able to deliver investigators very quickly who are qualified and enthusiastic about the protocol. That investigator enthusiasm has a significant impact on successful patient recruitment.”

PrincipalInvestigators.com is another company building a global database of investigators. Would-be investigators register their clinical background and interests, trial experience, location, and availability; sponsors search the database for likely matches and post their trial needs.

“We outsource investigator recruitment for CROs,” said Marketing Manager Mike Dziurkawski in Poland. “We offer an alternative solution for CROs that would rather focus on their own core strengths. We can provide a pool of investigators that is both deeper and more geographically diverse than any single sponsor or CRO.”

But the more obvious opportunity is linking patients with sponsors. The basic strategy is to target patients who are most likely to be appropriate for the trial and motivated to participate.

Patient Communities

Some programs target health care providers, usually clinicians and hospitals, by mining electronic health records to identify specific patient populations. But most would-be recruiters are going directly to patients. Some are CROs seeking to expand their service offerings by creating or partnering with online patient communities. And others are patient communities seeking to enhance treatment options by partnering with trial sponsors. Then there are information brokers seeking to link patient communities with trial sponsors/CROs.

Direct access to patients likely to qualify for trials as well as access to rich population data are key factors in all three business models. Patient communities self-select for specific conditions, are highly engaged, highly motivated to share information, and eager to advance treatment.

“The fundamental problem is finding the right patients for your trial,” said Brian Loew, CEO of Inspire, a private company that links patient support and advocacy groups with trial sponsors. “Online patient communities have given us an important piece of the puzzle. People in a community are more pre-disposed to participate in a trial than a random population of patients.”

Bringing patient communities into trial recruitment and retention is hardly new. HIV/AIDS groups broke down the doors of the clinical trial community in the 1980s and hundreds of disease-specific groups have followed. Breast cancer, autism, diabetes, asthma-pick a disease and there is almost certainly a patient advocacy group searching for better medicines, or a cure. Bringing more effective treatments to market faster is in patients’ own best interest.

“We want to see progress in trials and treatments brought to market earlier,” said Diane Gross, MPH, National Program Director for the Lupus Research Institute (LRI). “Lack of enrollment in trials means slower results. People with lupus need new treatments now. Anything we can do to move development along is our mission.”

How advocacy groups move development varies dramatically. The Michael J. Fox Foundation leverages its founder’s star status to build awareness for Parkinson’s as well as channel research funding. The Foundation also launched the Fox Trial Finder to give patients and caregivers a direct link to Parkinson’s trials that are currently recruiting. LRI and other advocacy groups use similar tactics, including disease fairs to provide face-to-face information and reach patients who may not have access to or use web-based technologies.

Jeri Burtchell blogged her multiple sclerosis trial experience and developed Partners in Research, a web-based community to share MS information and experiences and promote trial participation. An MS trial algorithm on the home page helps community members decide whether or not they should consider a trial. Except for patients who are well controlled and tolerate their current medication well, the answer is almost always yes.

CROs on the Move

“Patients and trial sponsors need to be brought into the 21st century,” Burtchell said. “Patients stand to gain or lose the most in research, but the reality is that you trust another patient before you trust an ad on TV or a pitch from pharma. Patient communities are the trusted resource that can bridge the gap, translate pharma speak into real language, and bring the patient perspective to trial sponsors."

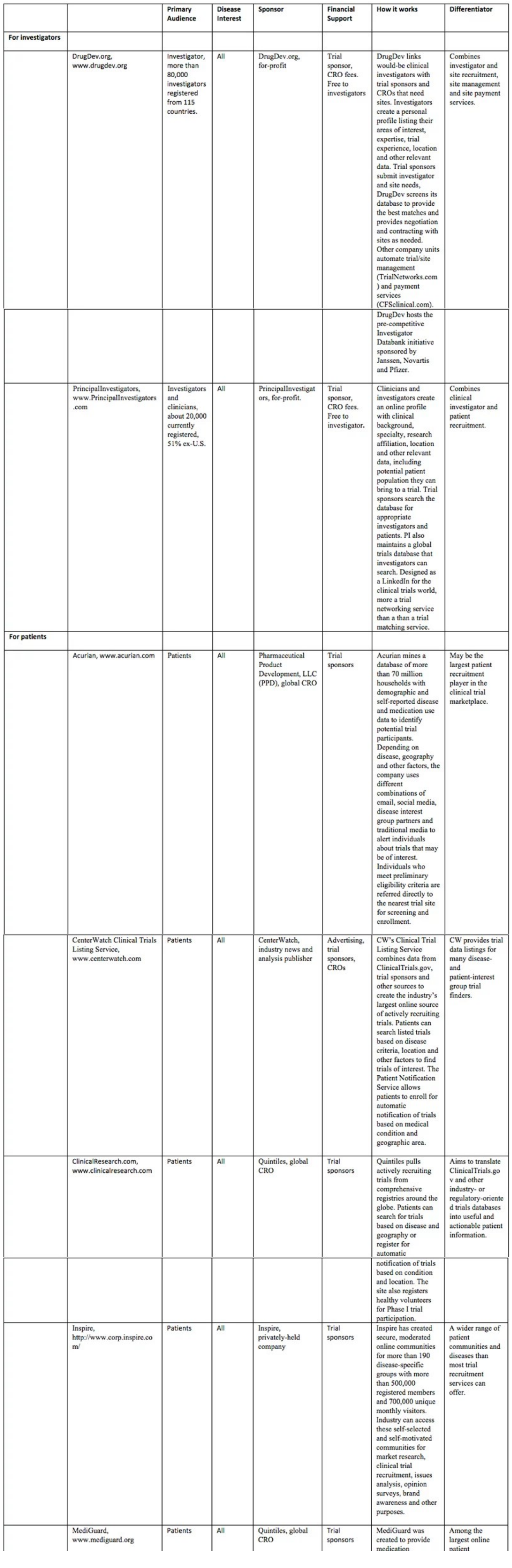
CROs are seeing similar value in bringing patients, and the patient perspective, to their trial sponsor clients.

"Patients are the most underutilized resource in the entire healthcare system because the traditional channels used to interact with them were created before the digital era," said John Reese, Senior Director, Health Engagement and Communication, for Quintiles. "In the United States, 90% of patients never hear about a clinical trial in their lifetime. We are trying to reach those 90%, using digital channels to educate and energize patients who are already empowered to improve their health through social media, patient communities and information sharing."

Quintiles created patient communities based on medication safety resources (MediGuard.org) and trial resources for specific diseases (ClinicalResearch.com). Patients and caregivers received qualified medical information and updates, Quintiles and its clients get de-identified patient data for population studies, and personal information that can be used to target trial participation offers. Reese said a recent COPD study enrolled its first patient in six minutes and completed enrollment in six weeks.

Other CROs are using social media and data mining to identify and contact potential trial participants. In 2013, PPD acquired Acurian, an electronic patient recruitment and retention firm, to help meet recruitment goals for its clients' trials and support their strategies for data-driven feasibility, site selection and enrollment delivery. Acurian can tap a database of more than 70 million households that includes self-reported disease information and medical data and reach out to patients directly via email, social media and other online techniques.

"We still do some radio and TV recruitment, but it is seen as less cost-efficient," said Rick Malcom, Executive Vice President and General Manager of Acurian. "Web-based activities have become increasingly important for patient recruitment and retention. But there is no one technique that is going to resolve every recruitment and enrollment challenge. Many people are potentially interested in trials. But it is very hard to make people aware that a trial is happening five miles away without specialized help."



		Primary Audience	Disease Interest	Sponsor	Financial Support	How it works	Differentiator
For investigators							
	DrugDev.org, www.drugdev.org	Investigator, more than 80,000 investigators registered from 115 countries.	All	DrugDev.org, for-profit	Trial sponsor, CRO fees. Free to investigators	DrugDev links would-be clinical investigators with trial sponsors and CROs that need sites. Investigators create a personal profile listing their areas of interest, expertise, trial experience, location and other relevant data. Trial sponsors submit investigator and site needs, DrugDev screens its database to provide the best matches and provides negotiation and contracting with sites as needed. Other company units automate trial/site management (TrialNetworks.com) and payment services (CFSclinical.com).	Combines investigator and site recruitment, site management and site payment services.
						DrugDev hosts the pre-competitive Investigator Databank initiative sponsored by Janssen, Novartis and Pfizer.	
	PrincipalInvestigators, www.PrincipalInvestigators.com	Investigators and clinicians, about 20,000 currently registered, 51% ex-U.S.	All	PrincipalInvestigators, for-profit.	Trial sponsor, CRO fees. Free to investigator.	Clinicians and investigators create an online profile with clinical background, specialty, research affiliation, location and other relevant data, including potential patient population they can bring to a trial. Trial sponsors search the database for appropriate investigators and patients. PI also maintains a global trials database that investigators can search. Designed as a LinkedIn for the clinical trials world, more a trial networking service than a than a trial matching service.	Combines clinical investigator and patient recruitment.
For patients							
	Acurian, www.acurian.com	Patients	All	Pharmaceutical Product Development, LLC (PPD), global CRO	Trial sponsors	Acurian mines a database of more than 70 million households with demographic and self-reported disease and medication use data to identify potential trial participants. Depending on disease, geography and other factors, the company uses different combinations of email, social media, disease interest group partners and traditional media to alert individuals about trials that may be of interest. Individuals who meet preliminary eligibility criteria are referred directly to the nearest trial site for screening and enrollment.	May be the largest patient recruitment player in the clinical trial marketplace.
	CenterWatch Clinical Trials Listing Service, www.centerwatch.com	Patients	All	CenterWatch, industry news and analysis publisher	Advertising, trial sponsors, CROs	CW's Clinical Trial Listing Service combines data from ClinicalTrials.gov, trial sponsors and other sources to create the industry's largest online source of actively recruiting trials. Patients can search listed trials based on disease criteria, location and other factors to find trials of interest. The Patient Notification Service allows patients to enroll for automatic notification of trials based on medical condition and geographic area.	CW provides trial data listings for many disease- and patient-interest group trial finders.
	ClinicalResearch.com, www.clinicalresearch.com	Patients	All	Quintiles, global CRO	Trial sponsors	Quintiles pulls actively recruiting trials from comprehensive registries around the globe. Patients can search for trials based on disease and geography or register for automatic	Aims to translate ClinicalTrials.gov and other industry- or regulatory-oriented trials databases into useful and actionable patient information.
						notification of trials based on condition and location. The site also registers healthy volunteers for Phase I trial participation.	
	Inspire, http://www.corp.inspire.com/	Patients	All	Inspire, privately-held company	Trial sponsors	Inspire has created secure, moderated online communities for more than 190 disease-specific groups with more than 500,000 registered members and 700,000 unique monthly visitors. Industry can access these self-selected and self-motivated communities for market research, clinical trial recruitment, issues analysis, opinion surveys, brand awareness and other purposes.	A wider range of patient communities and diseases than most trial recruitment services can offer.
	MediGuard, www.mediguard.org	Patients	All	Quintiles, global CRO	Trial sponsors	MediGuard was created to provide medication	Among the largest online patient