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Approaches to Encourage Physician Participation in Clinical Trials

Findings from a Global Survey

The number of clinical trials underway is rising – with some 5,408 medicines in development globally¹ – yet physician participation in Western Europe and the United States is falling^{2,3}. In Europe, 55% of investigators who submitted a 1572 in 2006 had not returned to conduct another study by 2011⁴, with similar figures being reported in other regions (55% for Canada, 53% for South America, 53% for Asia Pacific and 47% for Africa), and a slightly lower figure for the USA (35%). The impact of this high investigator turnover in industry-sponsored clinical trials is significant, contributing to escalating costs for site selection, qualification, training, and start-up.

While it is widely recognized that there are significant barriers to the process of engaging physicians and patients in research⁵, many doctors remain highly committed to doing clinical research. Obtaining a better understanding of investigator motivation as well as identifying barriers to participation in clinical research, will help the broader research community develop strategies for attracting and retaining investigators. In this article, we aim to provide insight into both of these factors based on a multi-national survey of clinical trial investigators.

Methods & Response to a Global Investigator Survey

DrugDev surveyed 750 clinical trial investigators from its Global Network who were located in seven countries (Argentina, Australia, Germany, India, South Africa, the UK and the US). Specifically, we

invited approximately 11,000 randomly selected members from the DrugDev investigator network to participate in a 25-question survey between October and November 2013.

The survey was completed by 750 investigators (93 in Argentina, 61 in Australia, 60 in Germany, 81 in India, 45 in South Africa, 66 in the UK, and 344 in the US). The overall response rate was 7% with country level response ranging from 4% (Germany) to 14% (Argentina). Of the respondents, 8.1% had participated in two or fewer trials, 37.7% in three to 10 trials, and 54.1% in more than 10 trials.

What Motivates Doctors to be Involved in Clinical Research?

Results indicate that investigators report primarily altruistic motivations for participating in research. The Top 3 factors, ranked in order of importance globally, were: 1. 'being involved at the forefront of research' (the top-ranking answer from 51.3% of respondents); 2. 'to benefit current patients' (31.5%); and 3. 'to benefit future patients' (10.4%) (Figure 1).

Interestingly, the top three factors are consistent across countries and study experience, with little variation. There was also very little variation in the bottom two ranking factors: to enhance my reputation amongst my peers and payment for myself. The one notable exception was Germany where payment and reputation factors were ranked higher than potential for publications.

What are the Perceived Barriers to Participation in Clinical Research?

When investigators are asked why more doctors are not participating in industry-sponsored clinical research, the global results showed over 80% of respondents strongly or somewhat agreed on the following contributing factors: not enough time, not enough resources, and too complicated (Figure 2).

There were some country-specific differences in the reasons for non-participation in research. In particular, in India and Argentina insufficient time

Finally, differences were also observed related to the degree to which awareness of clinical research was rated as a barrier to participation (Figure 5). The level of agreement that awareness of opportunities for clinical research is a barrier to participation was much higher in India or Argentina (56% and 51% respectively) vs. Australia (28%) or Germany (32%). These results suggest that country-specific initiatives aimed at promoting participation in clinical research have been effective.

Figure 1: Motivation for Physicians to be Involved in Clinical Research

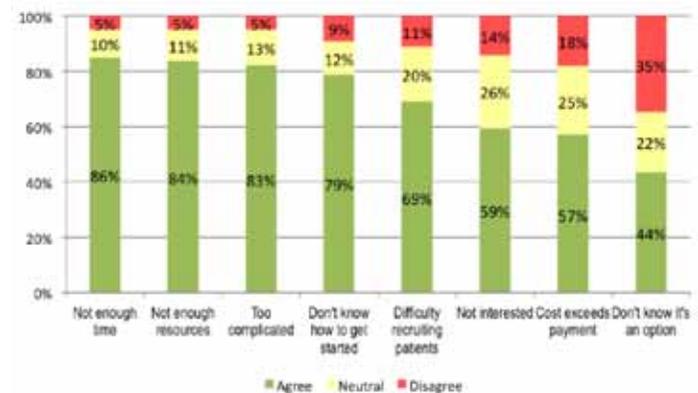
	Being involved at the forefront of research	Benefit my current patients	Benefit future patients	Potential for publications	Payment to support my clinical service	To enhance my reputation amongst my peers	Payment for myself
Argentina	1	2	3	4	5	7	6
Australia	2	1	3	4	5	6	7
United Kingdom	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
United States	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Germany	1	2	3	7	4	5	6
India	1	2	3	4	6	5	7
South Africa	2	1	3	5	4	6	7
Overall Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Question: In general, what motivates you to be involved in clinical research? Please rank these from greatest motivation (top) to least motivation (bottom).

and resources were identified by a lower proportion of investigators as a barrier to participation compared to the US, UK, Germany and Australia, potentially suggesting that other challenges are more pressing in India and Argentina or that clinical research is better prioritized compared to other clinical commitments (Figure 3).

Another difference observed between countries was related to the cost of start-up exceeding payment. In the UK, for example, only 36% of investigators somewhat or strongly agreed that the cost of start-up exceeding payment was a barrier to research as compared to over 60% in 4 other countries (Figure 4). This finding may be related to how budgets and payments are organized in the UK National Health Service in comparison to other countries.

Figure 2: Reasons Why More Doctors are Not Participating in Research



Question: In general, why do you think more doctors aren't participating in industry-sponsored clinical research? Strongly agree, somewhat agree, neutral, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree.

Figure 3: Perception that Insufficient Time and Resources are Barriers to Participation in Clinical Research by Country (% Somewhat or Strongly Agree)

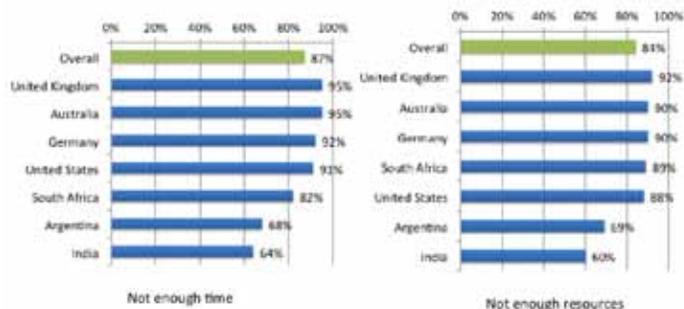


Figure 4: Perception that the Cost to Start-up Exceeding Payment is a Barrier to Participating in a Clinical Trial by Country (% Somewhat or Strongly Agree)

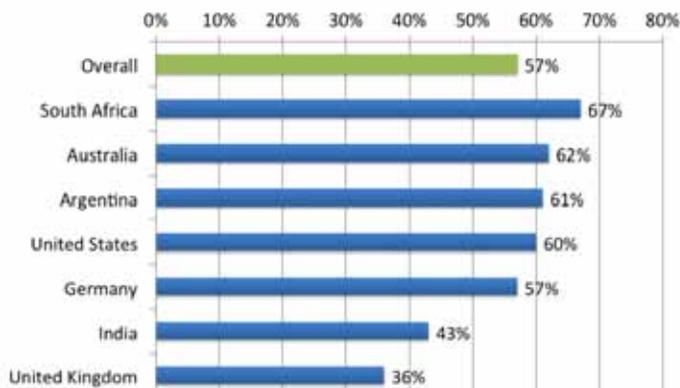
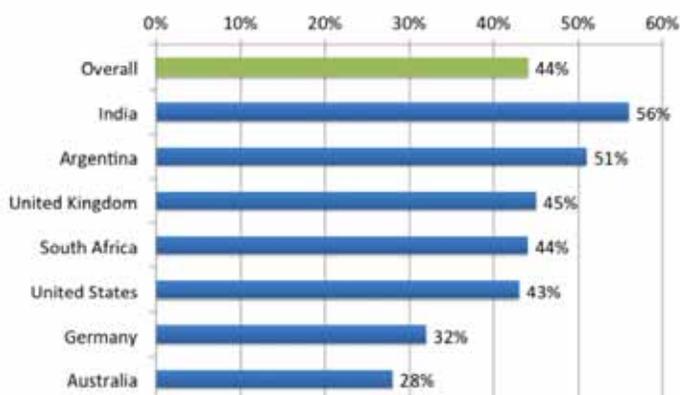


Figure 5: Perception that Investigators Don't Know that Clinical Research is an Option as a Barrier to Participating in a Clinical Trial by Country (% Somewhat or Strongly Agree)



Conclusions

While there are some limitations to this research in that the survey was conducted in a limited number of countries, amongst members of the DrugDev network, and, most importantly, with research-experienced physicians, they are directionally similar to the findings from other studies².

Specifically, our results would suggest that in the UK, US, Australia and Germany in particular, physicians need to be supported by providing sufficient resources and time to devote to research. In Argentina and India, implementing programs to inform doctors about clinical research as an option could potentially increase the levels of participation in these countries.

Across all countries, the need for practical support in circumnavigating the complexity of conducting clinical trials was cited as a key barrier to participation. Increased harmonization of the regulations concerning clinical trials globally could help to alleviate some of this complexity, as could initiatives from sponsors, CROs and government bodies to streamline the protocol inclusion/exclusion criteria and reduce the bureaucracy related to clinical trial conduct where possible. 



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