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Best Practices in Employing Digital and Online Technologies to Improve Patient Recruitment

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WHITE PAPER

INTRODUCTION

Without patient volunteers, clinical research would not be possible and potentially lifesaving treatments would never reach the market. Many life sciences companies are committed to the development of new therapeutics. One of the biggest challenges companies encounter is finding patients who meet the criteria to participate in clinical trials. Patient recruitment has become increasingly challenging since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. To achieve clinical study goals, efficient and effective patient recruitment practices are essential.

In this paper, we will touch upon some patient recruitment motivators as well as initiatives specific to digital and online engagement.

SHIFT TO DIGITAL

Two major goals of patient recruitment are to raise awareness about clinical trial and to enroll qualified patients. Over the years, the methods on how to recruit have evolved dramatically due to increased use of technology and the ability to quickly share and disseminate information on a global scale. Now more than ever, patients and caregivers search for health information online. In fact, 1 in every 20 Google searches is for health-related information. Digital engagement is fundamental to how patients, caregivers, and doctors find and share information.
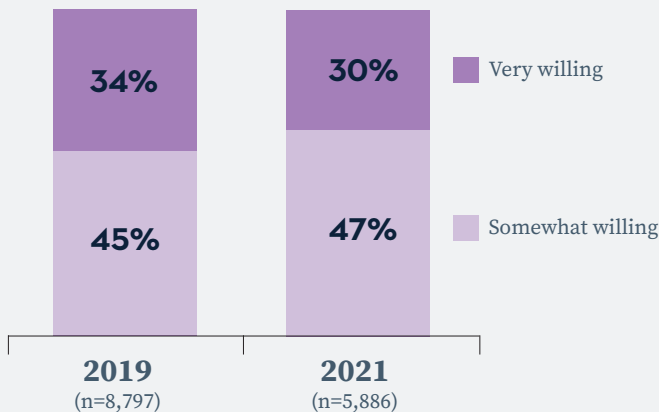
WHAT MOTIVATES PATIENT VOLUNTEERS?

In surveys conducted by the Center for Information and Study on Clinical Research Participation (CISCRP), it is found that one of the top reasons people volunteer for clinical trials is to help with the advancement of science in the development of new therapeutics. Top reasons for participation were very similar to previous findings by CISCPR in 2019.
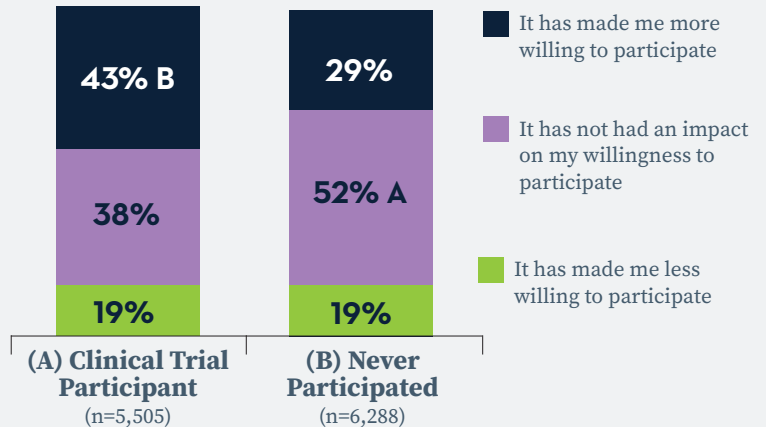
It is encouraging to know that patients are interested in participating in clinical trials, but the next big question is, how do you reach them?

PLEASE INDICATE WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ARE REASONS YOU DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE IN A CLINICAL RESEARCH STUDY

In general, how willing would you be to participate in a clinical research study?

2019 (n=8,797)	2021 (n=5,886)
Very willing 34%	Very willing 30%
Somewhat willing 45%	Somewhat willing 47%

What impact, if any, has the COVID-19 pandemic had on your willingness to participate in a clinical research study?

(A) Clinical Trial Participant (n=5,505)	(B) Never Participated (n=6,288)
43% B	29%
38%	52% A
19%	19%

- ■ It has made me more willing to participate
- ■ It has not had an impact on my willingness to participate
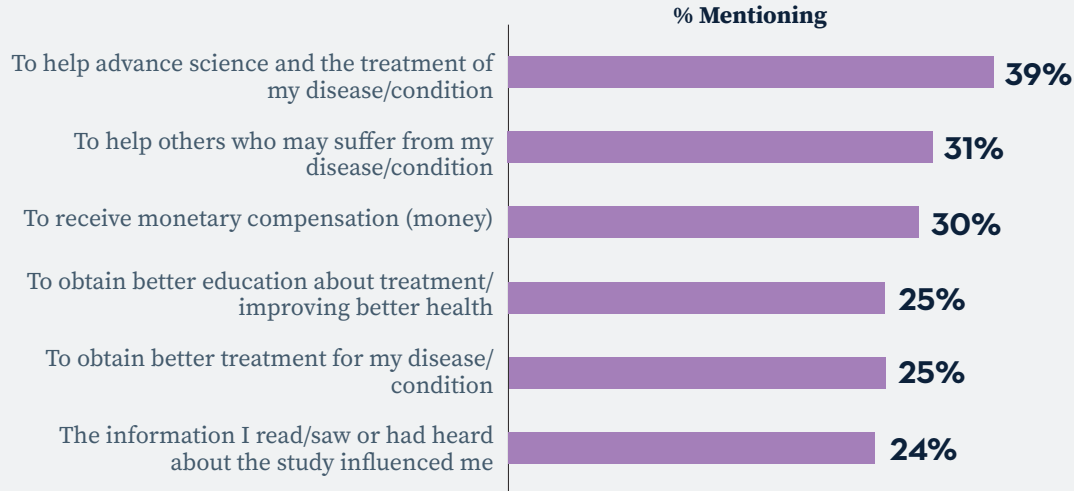- ■ It has made me less willing to participate

Base: Those who have participated in a clinical trial, excludes "I am not sure."

Letters indicate statistical significance at 95%. Sample size = 11,793. Base: All respondents

Source: Results of the 2021 CISCRP Perceptions & Insights Study. https://www.ciscrp.org/findings-from-the-ciscrp-2021-perceptions-insights-study/

TOP PARTICIPATION REASONS SIMILAR TO PRIOR YEARS (2019)

Willingness to participate in clinical trials was assessed with the majority of responders in 2019 and 2021 wanting to participate. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, for those who have previously participated in a clinical trial, there is more willingness to participate than those who have never participated.

% Mentioning

Reason	%
To help advance science and the treatment of my disease/condition	**39%**
To help others who may suffer from my disease/condition	**31%**
To receive monetary compensation (money)	**30%**
To obtain better education about treatment/ improving better health	**25%**
To obtain better treatment for my disease/ condition	**25%**
The information I read/saw or had heard about the study influenced me	**24%**

Sample Size = 5,505, Base: Those who have participated in a clinical trial.
Source: Results of the 2021 CISCRP Perceptions & Insights Study. https://www.ciscrp.org/findings-from-the-ciscrp-2021-perceptions-insights-study/

PATIENT-CENTERED RECRUITMENT INITIATIVES

Putting patients first is paramount in clinical trial recruitment and participation. Patients have come to expect content and messaging that is relevant to them and their specific situation. That is why it is so important to listen to and understand patients, their journeys, and the insights from their experiences to engage with them effectively.

And, while there is no easy solution to finding the right patients, there is evidence that some patient-centered initiatives have a bigger impact on recruiting efforts than others. As always, it is key to consider the cost and ease to conduct and report impact. Below is a list of some of the most effective patient-centered initiatives based on DIA patient engagement research findings:

✓ Advocacy Group Support and Involvement

✓ Patient Advisory Panels and Focus Groups

✓ **Social Media/Online Engagement**

✓ Patient Counseling and Education

✓ Adaptive Trial Designs and Adaptive Licensing

Given the focus of this paper is patient recruitment in the digital age, we will focus on Social Media/Online Engagement initiatives and dig into some best practices utilized in the industry.

DIGITAL IMPACT

Patients are no longer passive when it comes to managing their healthcare. Research shows that the majority of people learn about clinical trials online via government databases and online communities.

Online channels provide a variety of ways to not only reach patient and caregiver populations, but also gain insights from conversations that are already taking place. Below are some key tactics and tools:

Social listening
This reveals valuable patient sentiment insights around a disease/condition, provides a competitive landscape, and enables you to learn where patients are searching for information and spending their time, which can be used to advise media planning and targeting.
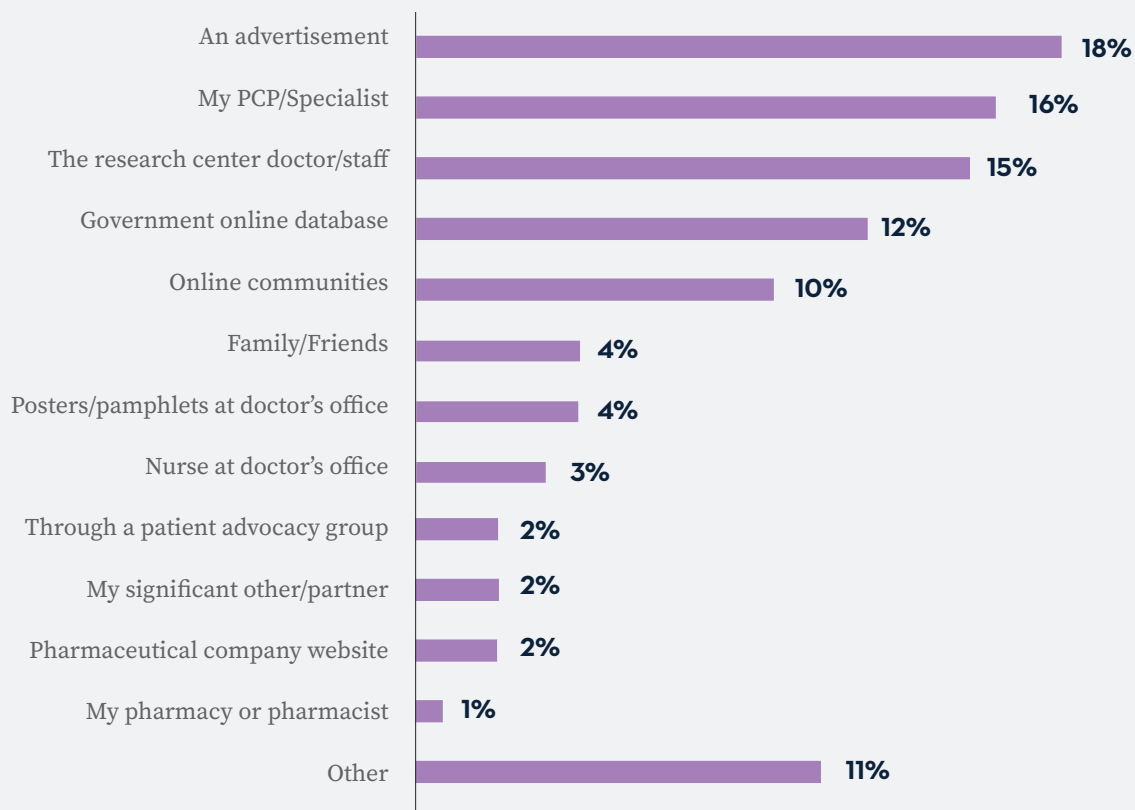
Social channels
Facebook, Instagram, and other channels are a targeted way to reach niche audiences. The ability to target patients based on gender, age, interests, and geographic location can ensure content and messaging show up for the right audience at the right time.

Website pre-screeners
Narrowing the funnel of all website visitors to pre-qualified visitors will prevent wasted time and energy for both the patient and the investigator. Pre-screeners should be carefully crafted to ask questions written in patient-friendly language and be easy to understand and answer. The pre-screener is the first step to identify patients that are more likely to meet inclusion/exclusion criteria and enroll in a study.

TOP SOURCES WHERE PEOPLE LEARNED ABOUT CLINICAL RESEARCH STUDIES

Source	Percentage
An advertisement	18%
My PCP/Specialist	16%
The research center doctor/staff	15%
Government online database	12%
Online communities	10%
Family/Friends	4%
Posters/pamphlets at doctor's office	4%
Nurse at doctor's office	3%
Through a patient advocacy group	2%
My significant other/partner	2%
Pharmaceutical company website	2%
My pharmacy or pharmacist	1%
Other	11%

Source: CISCRP | Base: Those Who Have Participated in a Clinical Trial | n=3,654. https://www.ciscrp.org/findings-from-the-ciscrp-2021-perceptions-insights-study/

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FINAL THOUGHTS

We have only covered a small portion of what it takes to recruit patients for clinical trials, but we feel that digital initiatives are an important piece of the overall recruitment strategy. Additionally, digital initiatives give you the ability to track metrics, analyze data, and spot trends to help optimize efforts for maximum ROI. Campaigns can be stopped and started with the click of a button, and it is easier to pilot new ideas online with low associated risk.

Finally, it is important to remember that before executing digital recruitment efforts there needs to be a comprehensive strategy in place. Set yourself up for success by getting internal buy-in, identifying a dedicated patient engagement team, and considering partners, such as recruitment and retention agency vendors, to help develop your digital patient recruitment strategy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharlene Savino is an experienced professional with over 30 years in biopharmaceutical drug development in rare diseases, immuno-oncology, oncology, immunology, ophthalmology, and cardiovascular therapeutic areas. Her roles have been in the areas of protein purification, scale-up and tech transfer and clinical manufacturing. She has been the CMC leader on several products in early through late-stage product development and was the key point of contact for the Clinical teams and other key stakeholders. Sharlene has been a valued people manager, mentor, and builder of highly effective teams.

ABOUT VERISTA

Verista is a leading business and technology consultancy firm that provides systems, compliance, validation and quality solutions to life science companies enabling them to improve health and improve lives. We help clients solve their most critical and complex challenges across the GxP lifecycle, from preclinical and clinical to commercialization, manufacturing and distribution – bringing together decades of knowledge, the most advanced engagement platforms and transformative technologies. This allows clients to benefit from the ease, efficiency and trust that results from working with one partner who excels across specialties. Verista's clients trust the company's 500+ experts to deliver consistent, safe and high-quality results across the product development lifecycle.

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