

# Using Remote and Recent History to Forecast and Formulate a Bright Future in Oncological Clinical Trials

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COLLABORATE FORWARD



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The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 presented unique challenges; namely, that **an earth-shattering ONE BILLION** diagnostic visits were missed.

**“We know where we are going when we know where we have been.”** This sentiment from the February 2021 Sites NOW session underscores the vitality of using past lessons learned to facilitate forward movement—a tenet that is more important in the current clinical research landscape than ever before. The session was conducted at the 2021 Global Oncology Site Solutions Summit, where clinical research leaders focused on past pitfalls and progress that influence the current oncological clinical study climate and forged a path forward towards a more inclusive and impactful future.

In her presentation, Sandy Smith, RN, MSN, AOCN, Senior Vice President, Clinical Solutions and Strategic Partnerships, WCG, provided a comprehensive overview of the milestones met in the field of oncological research as it has evolved since the 1990s. Among these is a monumental decrease in cancer mortality over the past decades due to a myriad of factors identified through successful clinical trials, specifically, increased prevalence of early detection and the development of effective therapeutics.

While the hallmark of the oncological research field since its inception has been its extraordinary achievements, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 presented unique challenges; namely, that an earth-shattering one billion diagnostic visits were missed due to the inability and hesitation of patients to present in a clinical setting for potential detection and diagnosis of cancer. These missed diagnostic visits are detrimental to early cancer detection, limiting treatment options for patients. While 2020 inhibited detection and treatment, Smith indicated that it did not inhibit nor threaten the momentum of oncological clinical trials, which continued forward and adroitly adapted to facilitate safe study execution.

Smith projects that, while the hindrances of the 2020 pandemic

will have lasting effects, 2021 and beyond will see methodologies that will improve the effectiveness of conducting decentralized trials and catalyze continued growth in oncological research. Among these methodologies is the increased prevalence of artificial intelligence in study execution and more access to telehealth and home-health monitoring. Smith emphasized the importance of study diversity in developing effective oncological treatments and theorized that the success of initiatives focused on inclusive enrollment combined with the technological advancements expected in the field will lead to the development of highly targeted cancer treatments in the future.

After Smith's session, clinical executives convened in breakout groups to forge cohesive responses to a central query: How can the collaboration between oncology sites and industry evolve right now? The answers encompassed all phases of the immediate research pipeline.

Prior to the study, the promulgation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for successful development and execution of decentralized trials is essential. "Oncology trials need to be simplified," asserted one clinical executive, who attributed the site-level hesitation to undertake oncological trials to the complexity that has come to be conventional in such studies.

During the study, communication lines must be clear. Streamlined communication methods between the study subjects and investigators such as electronic consent were championed. At the site itself, workflow challenges must be identified quickly so that effective resolutions can be implemented before risking study disruption.

Post-study, the insights gained need to be openly disseminated between sites so that the lessons learned by one can translate into knowledge for all.

The effectiveness of Sites NOW is measured by turning the results of these conversations into actual changes in research. It is up to SCRS members and our industry supporters to implement the solutions discussed in the Sites NOW session and at the other SCRS oncology program meetings.

**SCRS Sites NOW** is a virtual discussion and content project created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and focused on the changing landscape clinical research sites and industry partners now face. Each session is centered around a singular topic; in January, the topic was the Evolution of Patient Engagement. Attendees benefit from an opening presentation hosted by an industry leader who provides a unique perspective and meaningful metrics on the topic at hand, then break out into groups for a dynamic discussion guided by relevant queries designed to identify areas of opportunity for participants in the clinical research pipeline.

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