

The State of the Clinical Workforce

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Nicole Mills
Director of Clinical Research
Medix

Presented by Nicole Mills from Medix, May's Sites NOW discussion, "The State of the Clinical Workforce", centered around what site teams of the future will look like and how the industry can prepare. Mills initiated the conversation by sharing what has changed for the clinical research workforce since 2019, followed by emerging trends the industry needs to be aware of, and ways we can all work together to adapt to a new normal in clinical research.

Where We Are Now

"For most sites, 2020 was a year of unprecedented clinical and financial challenges," said Mills. "COVID-19 continues to drive significant and rapid change across the healthcare industry."

The pandemic fueled a greater focus on flexibility with 83% of sites saying they are confident in their team's ability to quickly adjust strategies in response to sudden changes. "We are rapidly adjusting on our feet as time goes on and we're feeling more confident in 2021 with the changes that we're adapting to," Mills expanded.

According to the "2021 Healthcare and Financial Technology Trends" report by [Syntellis](#), at the onset of COVID-19, nearly 60% of sites said that resource constraints left them unprepared. This number dropped significantly heading into 2021 with 34% of sites claiming resource constraints. "Sites are rebounding, studies are recovering, were' starting to get more stable business, but still 34% are thinking their resources are remaining a barrier for them at this point," Mills shared.

Fortunately, many sites were able to quickly adapt to new changes brought on due to COVID-19, and 74% of sites said their personnel is prepared with the necessary skill sets needed for 2021. "We have adjusted, we've written SOPs, we've modified our staff, and we've done what we needed to do at the site level, so our personnel continues to be a strength as we move into 2021." Communications confidence has also increased due to many sites adapting to remote work and virtual visits. Those who feel prepared to handle communications and process changes increased from 51% at the start of the pandemic to 82% heading into 2021.

According to Tufts University, decentralized trials, telemedicine, remote monitoring, use of technology, and COVID-focused trials have increased dramatically. Since 2019, telemedicine has increased by 87% and remote monitoring has increased 57% which means sites need to adapt roles to accommodate these new needs. Nearly 30% of sites said that their current tools and

technology do not adequately prepare them to support financial tracking, management, and reporting changes. This is down from 54% at the start of the pandemic, but there is still room for improvement to find the right systems that will help streamline these processes for sites.

Emerging Trends

There is a robust and healthy growth cycle being experienced by the industry right now, which means recruiting has been a challenge, especially since there are many more job opportunities available than there are candidates. Looking at data from the last two years from Career Builder, supply and demand for experienced clinical research personnel is approximately 1:7 nationwide, meaning for every clinical research position posted, one person is looking for a role. This can change depending on geographic location and position. “More people are employed and the demand for staff is continuing to rise,” says Mills. “Hiring is a challenge for everyone right now.”

Contingent staffing has been an appealing solution as it offers flexibility with the ebbs and flows of study volume. Temporary, contract, or flex staffing provides sites with an option to maintain clinical research activity while organizational hiring freezes. Temporary contracts are appealing to research staff if they are furloughed, want to try out different areas in clinical research, or simply for those who want more flexibility.

The increasing need for experienced clinical research staff means sites need to have a solid pipeline of training and talent development processes. This may include internships, employee shadowing, and budget allocation for additional training needs. Dedicated recruiters or trainers that educate new staff members as they come on board can make the training process much easier for sites so that studies can be completed more quickly.

There is also an opportunity for sponsors to offer financial assistance for sites to hire additional staff if it will improve timelines for enrollment and data entry for trials. This is an industry-wide issue that requires all stakeholders to be part of the conversation – because if sites are not properly staffed, it affects studies. Sponsors and CROs want to understand these challenges so we as an industry can find solutions to ensure sites are properly staffed so we can get medications to patients more quickly.

Looking Ahead

With many sites having to recalibrate processes and their teams due to COVID-19, sites of the future are embracing exciting trends in clinical research such as enhanced patient care through remote monitoring, decentralized trials, telemedicine, and eConsent. According to [data from WCG CenterWatch](#), many sites surveyed said they plan to continue using telemedicine and remote coordinators after the pandemic subsides. Sites that continuously embrace new technology can make the trial experience more efficient and effective and allow sites to engage with patients in new ways.

This presents a unique need for site staff as different roles are needed to accommodate new ways of conducting trials. Medix, a staffing and workforce solutions company supporting sponsors, CROs, and sites, has seen an increase in demand for home health nurses, additional investigators, CRAs, and monitors, technology officers, or IT personal with research experience who can support increased use of technology, and flex staff to accommodate COVID-19 patients.

SCRS Sites NOW brings the Site Solutions Summit community together with a focus on evolving best practices for site success. With feedback from sites, sponsors, CROs, and solution providers working to evolve best practices and SOPs, the goal of every meeting is to come away with key learnings that we can glean insights from and share with the industry. We encourage sites to join the next SCRS Sites NOW meeting, convening every month.

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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.

7250 Parkway Drive, Suite 405
Hanover, MD 21076

Phone: +1 410.696.5080
info@myscrs.org

