The Power of Mobile Technology to Optimise Patient Engagement and Study Success

In post-industrial countries, the average person spends five hours a day on their smartphone – and cancer patients are no exception.

The device is within arm's-reach for over 19 hours a day. It's checked within moments of waking and viewed more than 500 times in any 24-hour period. In short, a person's mobile phone is a direct link to them, all day every day.[1]

As such, it is a powerful tool that can be used to tear down barriers to participation and optimise patient engagement throughout the lifespan of a clinical trial – from enrolment to treatment and completion.

With fewer than five per cent of oncology patients[2] taking part in clinical trials, and many of those who do sign up dropping out along the way, it's a tool that should not be left on the shelf.

Mobile is Everywhere

The use of mobile technology in oncology studies is becoming more and more common, most notably in collecting patient-reported outcomes. But despite its ability to improve patient engagement throughout the life of a trial, it isn't widely utilised in this area.

By embracing this potential, companies and sponsors can reap the rewards of engagement while positioning themselves as leaders in this emerging technology.

We all know how integral mobile technology has become to our daily lives. For many people, their smartphone is the last thing they look at before they go to sleep and the first thing they see when they wake up in the morning.

Utilising mobile technology, then, offers trial organisers more visibility than any other platform. Tapping into this direct line allows sponsors and CROs to seamlessly introduce multimedia protocol instructions and make trial activities part of patients' everyday lives in trial.

Driving Participation and Engagement

Patients value the application of technology in clinical trials because it can reduce the burden studies place them under. This is particularly true in oncology, where protocols, symptoms and treatment-related side-effects are complex and difficult to cope with.

According to a study conducted in conjunction with PMG Research,[3] 31 per cent of people would be more likely to participate in a study knowing that a mobile app would be available.

Many study participants are also consumers who are used to conducting much of their lives through their mobile phone. When taking part in a clinical trial, then, they expect a coherent experience that optimises and organises their participation.

Aside from its ubiquitous nature, the joy of mobile is its adaptability. It can provide information through the use of interactive text, graphics, animation or video to convey information and meaning. Each communication can be tailored to maximise comprehension.

Empowered participants who fully understand the study and their role within it, are more invested in its success and less likely to drop out.

Mobile can also provide direct connectivity with individuals and services, simplifying and organising activity, and making life easier.

Building Clinical Trial Mobile Technology that Works

Building mobile solutions that oncology patients want to engage with is about more than technology for technology's sake.

When setting out on a mobile technology journey, it's important to consider how the applications being designed will be received by the end user – because that is what, ultimately, will build engagement.

Is it Easy to Use?

In complex, multi-faceted oncology studies, patients have been asked to interact with multiple websites, apps, text messages and emails. This can be overwhelming, and impact negatively on engagement.

Fortunately, we are now moving way beyond simply delivering a range of disparate apps.

Innovators are designing seamless integrations that bring multiple functions into one digital touchpoint for the study. It means that ePRO and eCOA data capture, eConsent, patient payments, courier and travel services, home health nursing and much more are no longer separate online entities.

Study participants can receive visit schedules and alerts regarding their visits and dosage via a single application and feel safe in the knowledge that they can communicate with sites when they need to.

Cancer patients have enough to deal with, so it's up to study organisers to make participating as easy as possible. Combining as many trial activities as they can into a single app is an important step on that journey.

Is it Credible?
Ensuring technological solutions are designed to be intuitive and clean will help participants understand the importance of the trial as well as give a good impression of its quality. This, in turn, will build personal investment and patient engagement.

Is it Creative?
Visit reminders, medication compliance alerts and study notifications are the nuts and bolts of mobile clinical trial technology. But it doesn't have to stop there – and nor should it.

Gamification can boost understanding of study outcomes or aid the adoption of the healthy behaviours that are so important for people undertaking a cancer journey.

Controlled image capture can assess dermatological side-effects or injection site reactions. Trial instructions can be supported by illustrated or video guides developed by the trial team.

Other possibilities include providing access to lay summaries or other relevant data, or images that are culturally appropriate to different participating countries. Trial updates, like patient completion and regulatory submission, as well as simple expressions of gratitude towards patients, can also be shared.

All this builds engagement by helping the patient derive value from their participation and understand how much the study appreciates their input.

Summary
The cancer treatment landscape is advancing all the time, and the future is bright. But continued progress depends on successful clinical trials, and successful clinical trials depend on engaged patients.

Innovators are pushing the boundaries of what is possible through mobile technology. The results hold a window to a future of clinical trials built on partnership between study organisers and participants.

And with growing evidence that patient engagement is synonymous with increased retention and greater per-patient ROI, it is a future the industry cannot afford to miss.

REFERENCES

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