Obtaining Patient Insights in Uncertain Times:

How can we keep patients, sponsors, healthcare personnel, and researchers safe while facing a possible pandemic?

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We are all glued to our devices, looking for updates on the spread and impact of the novel Coronavirus and wondering how to keep ourselves and our families safe. This past week, we saw several of our biopharmaceutical clients planning changes to day-to-day operations due to the virus: instituting travel restrictions, limiting large-group meetings, and considering how virtual technologies and work-from-home practices can be used to ensure business continuity. Given the challenges we may soon face, how do we continue to incorporate the voices of patients into R&D activities and throughout the product development lifecycle, while keeping patients and our research teams safe?

Putting Safety First

Because face-to-face qualitative research methods—including trial simulations, patient panels, and guided assessments with both HCPs and patients—can be the optimal way to obtain patient insights, travel and group gatherings are a way of life for our teams. However, sponsors and researchers need to put the health and safety of patients first. We must carefully consider the needs and condition of our target patient population, and whether a proposed methodology will work for that group.

Because of the spread of Covid-19 and the potential for a global pandemic, at HealthiVibe we're reconsidering our approach to both current and planned projects, and we encourage all patient insight professionals to do the same.

The keys to our approach include:

1. Leaving the door open to the use of face-to-face methodologies while planning for virtual alternatives
2. Being nimble and flexible, so changes to research methods will not significantly impact timelines or budgets

3. Analyzing research objectives and applying our knowledge and experience to select the best virtual method to meet these objectives
4. Considering whether a location change may be required based on either patients' comfort level with virtual technology or cultural norms in certain countries
5. Proactively communicating alternatives to all stakeholders so no one is surprised if a change must be made mid-project

A Sample Contingency Plan

For example, HealthiVibe is currently planning a trial simulation involving both clinical trial site staff and patients. In our planned face-to-face methodology, a U.S.-based research scientist and project manager will travel to three countries to simulate trial procedures with a site coordinator, primary investigator, and several patients in each country. In non-English speaking countries, a foreign language moderator and simultaneous translator will join the team on site. Several clinical scientists and trial operations professionals, trial technology vendors, and CRO representatives plan to observe the simulation at the research site (while others do so virtually). In all, 10 – 20 people will travel and meet in-person to learn how to optimize this trial in each country.

While we remain hopeful that the planned methodology can be used, we're actively planning virtual alternatives. Our teams have put into place a detailed plan that includes:

- Selection of a technology platform that optimizes personal interaction between site staff and patients and feels as "transparent" as possible—allowing participants to focus on trial procedures, not the platform
- Virtual simultaneous translation by multiple concurrent translators, ensuring observers will fully comprehend the interactions in real time
- Extended times for 1-on-1 videoconference interviews with patients following each simulation, allowing time to build rapport and a personal connection with the moderator as we obtain authentic patient reactions to the protocol
- Early and repeated technology checks with all participants
- Virtual "dry-run" practice events with moderators, simultaneous translators, site coordinators and primary investigators
- Training of all observers on the use of the virtual backroom

This detailed plan may never be used; the point is to be ready to pivot quickly and obtain insights whether or not our teams and patients can meet in person.

HealthiVibe encourages everyone in our field to take a similar approach to planning patient interactions in these uncertain times.

Moving forward

Most importantly, we must all continue our work to collect patient insights for clinical development teams. The novel Coronavirus could create increased challenges with clinical trial recruitment and retention, and actionable patient insights will be needed to ensure trials stay on track.

For more information on our creative methodologies for obtaining patient insights in any circumstances, please contact us at info@healthivibe.com or visit www.healthivibe.com.