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Using Social Media to Improve Patient Retention

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Social media offer sponsors and CROs a greatly enhanced ability to improve patient retention and compliance with both clinical and post-marketing studies. The first step to determining if and how social media can help is to assess the target populations.

- Analyze how similar populations are engaging online—what information is exchanged and how it is communicated. For example, the Multiple Sclerosis community is widely known for its active social networks, which use online communities to share information on a wide range of topics, from side effects to lifestyle tips.
- Take into consideration the limitations on social networks, including:
 - The challenge of monitoring content for adverse events
 - Unbalanced information around risks and benefits
 - Information exchanges among trial participants
- There are multiple ways for sponsors to overcome these issues. For example, a Facebook page for patients participating in an ongoing study can limit access for users to generate

content or require sponsor or CRO approval before publication. This requires some oversight by the sponsor or CRO, but the benefit of engaging patients throughout the study is well worth it. FDA guidance on how social media should be used in the post-marketing setting is expected this year.

- The most important aspect of patient retention is systematic and ongoing communication to garner and maintain patient interest. Long-term post-marketing studies often struggle with patient lost-to-follow-up rates, but tools can help maintain patient interest over time:
 - a. podcasts
 - b. outbound email text reminders
 - c. video sharing and widgets
 - d. Physician networks such as Sermo™ can create interest from physicians to participate in observational studies

Social networks require some initial investment and monitoring, but they offer an effective tool for sponsors, CROs and patients and caregivers to exchange and share information that will enhance patient retention and compliance, and, in the end, provide better care.



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