

Sites rate their relationships with IRBs

Positive ratings and improvement areas across multiple attributes

Institutional review boards (IRBs) received generally positive ratings for their relationships with investigative sites, according to a first-of-its-kind survey conducted by CenterWatch, yet the survey also identified key opportunities for improvement. In addition, nearly half of respondents polled consider the level of IRB oversight excessive.

The quality of relationships between IRBs and investigative sites has improved in recent years as review boards have implemented more efficient processes and technologies to streamline ethical review processes. Overall, about three-fourths of respondents gave IRBs “good” or “excellent” ratings across a majority of the relationship quality attributes measured. The IRBs, which included both independent central IRBs and local IRBs that serve individual academic institutions or hospitals, received the highest marks for general project management attributes, including being organized and setting realistic review timelines.

Yet the survey showed that “excellent” ratings for IRB performance typically didn’t rise much above the 50% mark in most categories measured. IRBs received lower marks for communication issues such as providing investigative sites with a single contact person and clearly communicating delays. Providing better guidelines for completing forms and simplifying the use of electronic document manage-

IRB oversight survey

How would you characterize your impression of IRB oversight in general?



Source: CenterWatch, 2016; n=96

ment systems were other critical areas identified for improvement.

Significantly, as the IRB landscape has consolidated in the past couple of years, the five largest IRBs—WIRB-Copernicus Group (WCG), Quorum Review IRB, Schulman IRB, Chesapeake IRB and BRANY IRB—outperformed their smaller counterparts in the majority of relationship categories measured. However, the smaller IRBs, which included both central and local IRBs, earned the highest marks for understanding local regulatory and ethics issues.

The survey results suggest opportunities for improving IRB relationships as the industry has begun to move toward a centralized ethical review model designed to increase the quality and efficiency of IRB oversight. The NIH has mandated a single IRB review for multisite studies it funds in the U.S. and the federal government has proposed changes to the Common Rule, which regulates IRB oversight of human research, intended to increase reliance on central IRBs. Many sponsor companies and CROs

have also begun to require central IRB review as a condition for participating in multisite studies.

“Without question, the redundant and duplicative reviews of the same protocol by dozens, and sometimes hundreds, of different local IRBs is the single biggest contributor to study startup delays arising from the IRB process,” said Nicholas Slack, executive vice president and chief growth officer at WCG.

Methodology

CenterWatch’s 2016 IRB Relationship Quality Survey was conducted online from June through September among a global community of investigative sites, CROs and sponsors. The survey represents the first time CenterWatch has compiled a report card on IRB relationships and established benchmarks that will be updated in coming years. In addition, the survey measures IRB performance to provide the industry with a deeper understanding of areas that might con-