

SELECTING AND DEVELOPING YOUR RESEARCH COORDINATOR

This individual can make or break your research program.

BY VICKI WILLIAMS



I am enjoying my 39th year in the ophthalmic industry. I held my first three jobs in hospital ORs back in the day of intracapsular cataract extraction. Then, between 1984 and 1998, I worked at three different ophthalmic practices in three different states as a technician, a private scrub nurse, a practice administrator, and a research coordinator for various ophthalmic drug and medical device studies. In 1998, I joined Abbott Medical Optics, where I worked for 15 years, my last 3 as a global trainer. Now, I am employed by Glaukos and work with clinical sites, principal investigators (PIs), and research coordinators across the United States.

Based on my experience, choosing and developing a research coordinator are a major factor in successfully conducting clinical research.

SELECTING YOUR RESEARCH COORDINATOR

There are numerous factors to consider when selecting a research coordinator, but I believe that three are fundamental: ophthalmic knowledge, research experience, and a positive attitude.

Ophthalmic Knowledge

People do not learn ophthalmic language, definitions, and acronyms or the dynamics of an ophthalmic surgical practice overnight. Finding an experienced ophthalmic assistant or technician willing to focus on research is a real plus. An experienced scribe, receptionist, billing representative, or office manager could also be a fit. Ophthalmic experience can jumpstart a new research coordinator's ability to enroll subjects quickly and precisely, which will be of real help to the PI.

Research Experience

A research coordinator wears many hats. It is a given that understanding and following the specific study protocol is an absolute necessity. Additionally, he or she leads the clinical

trial education of staff eye care providers and interacts regularly and frequently with the technicians to find potential study candidates. The coordinator's networking skills can and should also help to identify candidates for inclusion in a study. He or she empowers the PI, motivates staff to stay involved, comforts enrolled subjects, and frequently communicates with the study sponsor.

Effective research coordinators are meticulous, inquisitive, self-motivated, organized, ethical, and committed. These attributes allow them to positively affect the vitality, efficiency, and compliance of your clinical trials. Diligence is paramount. Every day is enrollment day! A proficient and savvy research coordinator makes a PI more successful.

As new studies become available, sponsors often turn first to productive sites from past trials. By compromising a site's

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AT A GLANCE

- Selecting and developing a research coordinator are key to successfully conducting clinical research.
- When hiring a person for the job, three major factors are ophthalmic knowledge, research experience, and a positive attitude.
- Training is a process, not an event. Continuing development is as important as the initial education.

performance, a negligent or uninvolved research coordinator can decrease its chance of selection for future studies.

Positive Attitude

A positive attitude can trump experience. To my mind, skills can be taught, but attitude cannot. When choosing a research coordinator, look for competence, confidence, compassion, authenticity, passion, an unwavering can-do attitude, and a zeal for learning and success.

DEVELOPING AND RETAINING YOUR RESEARCH COORDINATOR

Not surprisingly, developing a research coordinator requires time, on-the-job training, oversight by the PI and/or delegated trainer, and guidance from the study sponsor. The effort will enrich your research business and lessen the PI's load.

Training is a process, not an event; continuing development is as important as the initial education. Regularly sending your coordinator to training, research, recruitment, or leadership meetings keeps this individual fresh, motivated, competitive, engaged, and eager to succeed. Sharing best practices with fellow coordinators will allow yours to verify that the processes in place at your site are optimal. Organizations within the research field such as The Society of Clinical Research Associates (www.socra.org) offer membership and opportunities for continuing education.

A fully trained, seasoned, and well-established research coordinator is a treasure. Be sure to express your appreciation of his or her hard work regularly. Make the continuing development of your research coordinator a high priority. An expert PI will fully train and stay closely involved with this employee, recognize results, and steadfastly support his or her ongoing education. Investing in his or her career will reward your research program in many ways. ■

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