

Building the Post-award Management Infrastructure and Process Support to Reduce Turnaround Time to Collect Study Invoice(s) for Sponsor Clinical Trials

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1. Background

Slow and delinquent sponsor payments have been a longstanding operational concern for Stanford Cancer Institute (SCI) Cancer Clinical Trials Office (CCTO). A post-award pilot program of Clinical Research Groups found the range of time from invoice(s) to payment is 180 -240 days, more than double of contractual clauses.

Payment management stress negatively affects the conduct of clinical trials by hampering appropriate staffing, employee satisfaction, and regulatory compliance; all of which impeded patient recruitment and safety. It is critical to identify pain points and streamline the study payment process.

2. Goals

CCTO established post-award pilot program of two CRGs (Breast Oncology and Urology Oncology) last year, with the purpose to:

- Develop method to identify past-due account receivable invoices, follow-up timeline, and escalation process that helps verify unpaid payment
- Decrease past due payment (over 180 days) through more timely reconciliation in the first year
- Obtain dedicated financial support staff (Clinical Research Financial Specialist)

3. Solutions and Methods

For the short-term, the new method implemented below offered the best opportunity to identify past due payment timely

- Create a master budget calendar listing all categories of billable work/items, data points demonstrating activity completion, and information from the detailed remittance notification
- Create a mechanism for flagging past due invoice(s) to provide snapshots of the outstanding money and our receivables portfolio
- Establish strong tracking (such as Sponsor/CRO Contact History Report and ongoing risk identification) to minimize risk of having a cash deficit in a sponsored project
- Develop a timeline of follow up actions/escalation to be taken based on the number of days the payment is past due for routine collection items

We launched the new method on March 13, 2019. Baseline metrics was established for turnaround times to collect study invoice(s). Survey data was collected pre- and post- the launch to capture Principal Investigators (PIs) and CCTO Staff satisfaction with the post-award management support.

4. Outcomes

The baseline average time from invoice(s) to payment was 180 -240 days. Since implementation of the pilot program, average turnaround time to collect study invoice(s) for Urology Oncology (23 studies) and Breast Oncology (19 studies) is 48.5 days. The overall pilot PIs and CCTO Staff satisfaction with post-award management support increased by 65%.

The results demonstrated value of the pilot, and enabled us to hire a dedicated Clinical Research Financial Specialist in November 2019. This position was fully integrated into CRGs under the direction of CCTO, and serves as liaison between PIs, study team, Stanford Office of Sponsored Research, and department/division responding to sponsor inquiries.

5. Lessons Learned

- Critical to listen to all parties involved to understand their perspectives and ideas, and keep the dialogue open with internal and external stakeholders
- Valuable to hold weekly huddles to review data, set goals, and solve problems

Future directions for this program include:

- Improve metrics and continue data analysis to guide future changes
- Continue to streamline post-award management workflows and further decrease turnaround time to 30 days
- Continue to perform ongoing risk identification and identify risk factors, allowing us to develop targeted intervention that may minimize the likelihood of the risk occurring