Category: Resource Management and Finance - Work in progress

Financial Burden for Low-Income Trial Participants: Patient Travel Reimbursements

B. Ramachandran

Stanford Cancer Institute

1. Background

Clinical trial accruals from low-income neighborhoods, combined with underrepresented minority population, has always been a challenge. The process of financial reimbursement for travel, hotel, mileage, meals, and other incidental expenses pose hardship not only for the trial participants but also an administrative burden. Often these reimbursements do not cover the actual costs and are repaid with a significant delay. In an effort to standardize these reimbursements institution-wide for all sponsors, we are working on a guideline that will be adopted for all clinical trial budgets.

2. Goals

The aim of this intervention is to simplify travel reimbursements for the cancer trial participants. This aims to achieve the following:

- reduce the time spent on budget negotiation on these terms
- follow the same guidelines across all trials and all industry sponsors
- significantly reduce the trouble of providing receipts for all expenses from the trial participants
- reimburse the subjects in a timely manner to reduce their financial burden

3. Solutions and Methods

Devise an institution-specific travel reimbursement guideline covering all aspects of travel reimbursements to be requested from all sponsors for clinical trial participation. The guideline will cover the following aspects:

a) Propose travel reimbursement rates tied to U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) rates for hotels based on geographical area. This rate is revised every year by the government and the reimbursements will follow the current-year rates for travel
b) Coach tickets for air travel
c) Mileage rates for personal auto based on GSA rates revised yearly
d) Allowing mileage or ground transportation from hotel to clinic
e) No minimum mileage stipulations for coverage
f) Meals and incidentals based on GSA rates revised yearly
g) Incidental travel expenses like bridge tolls, parking, etc., at a flat rate.
h) Companion travel based on the requirement of each trial tied to the health condition of the trial participant
i) Additional reimbursement of childcare and associated economic burden, evaluated on a case-by-case basis

Patient stipends will be determined separately, if applicable.

4. Outcomes

It will be a win-win for the sponsor, the site, and the trial participant. The standard rates across all trials makes site reimbursement processing much easier. It reduces time for negotiating these rates as these rates are published by GSA every year. The trial participant only needs to provide receipts for big ticket items like air travel and hotel stay. All these will lead to reimbursing the trial participant faster, thus

reducing their financial burden. Ultimately, this leads to increased trial participation and accrual from low-income neighborhoods and those in financial hardship.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

There is a recognized need to simplify the travel reimbursement process. Cancer trial participants are often sick and need help. Increasing their financial burden due to the delay in reimbursements and partial reimbursements creates anxiety and hesitancy around trial participation. We are attempting to simplify this process, reimburse in a timely manner, and be considerate of the requirements to reimburse travel. This is a demonstrated need and all clinical research groups are waiting to embrace this initiative. Sponsors will also benefit from this initiative due to the transparent process and possible increase in trial accruals due to a successful reimbursement process.