

Transforming clinical research

HEALTHCARE WRITER PETER MANSELL EDITED BY CLAIRE BOWIE/JENNY HONE PHOTO BY MAGNUS REW

Innovative thinking to accelerate clinical research – yet without compromising quality – is the sector’s urgent new dynamic. That’s what this year’s International Clinical Researcher of the Year competition is all about

Today’s clinical research environment is complex and demanding. Companies are embracing new technologies and collaborative relationships to achieve the overarching goal of getting safe, effective and innovative medicines to the right patients as fast as possible.

Together with their outsourcing partners, they are trying to reduce costs and boost productivity while incorporating value markers into trials that address the varying needs of regulators, patients, healthcare professionals and budget managers.

So driving efficiency at all stages of R&D is a given. That calls for innovative thinking to eliminate duplication, accelerate processes without compromising quality, and optimise invaluable resources in clinical research. Moreover, it needs to be done in a highly regulated environment, where innovation sometimes rocks the boat.

The theme for next year’s International Clinical Researcher of the Year competition – *Inspiring performance through simplification* – reflects this urgent new dynamic in the sector.

Cutting edge entrants

The competition attracts entrants who are “at the cutting edge” of delivering transformative technologies, notes Paul Quinn, senior director, clinical development operations at Shire Pharmaceuticals.

Simplifying the processes that drive clinical research can involve some very basic changes. But those insights may remain below the sight-line unless clinical researchers are encouraged to think on their feet and outside the box.



International Clinical Researcher of the Year judges and executive steering group members

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Paul Quinn,
Shire Pharmaceuticals

This is what the real-time challenges in the PharmaTimes competitions are looking to tease out: creative and cost-efficient strategies that reduce complexity without diluting the rigorous standards for quality, transparency and consent applied across clinical research.

The rapidly changing clinical environment also encompasses a widening range of stakeholders. The executive steering committee and judging panel for the International Clinical Researcher of the Year competition include high-level representatives from the pharmaceutical industry, contract research organisations and clinical research sites, alongside the ABPI and Department of Health.

And unlike many other industry awards, the competition is designed and judged by the people who matter – the customers.

It also recognises the evolving contribution of the end-user, the patient. Increasingly, patients are not so much ‘subjects’ in a trial as informed and active participants who are helping to reshape research priorities and practices, whether through growing transparency in clinical research, dialogue via social media, or involvement in consent mechanisms and even trial design.

“Patients are the key customers in everything we do,” comments Sally Osmond, executive vice president and general manager, cardiovascular and endocrinology, at INC Research. “Drug research is highly focused on the end result, and that end result is the benefit to patients.”

As Carol Parish, senior director, global head of clinical development, skin health, at Stiefel, a GSK company, notes, the PharmaTimes competition is also sensitive to shifting roles within clinical research, such as that of the project manager, which has developed into a much more global strategic position – rather than just providing local clinical leadership.

Globalisation in clinical research has also altered the profile and scope of the competition. In fact, 2014 saw more international than UK entries, including contributions from a number of emerging markets such as India.

At the same time, the competition acknowledges – through categories such as the NHS Clinical Research Site of the Year – the crucial importance of UK clinical trials in building and sustaining relationships within the health service.

As one of last year’s winners, Tammy Holmes, operations manager in the research, development and innovation department at University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust, comments: “Our local knowledge and contacts speed trial set-up and ensure delivery for our partners. National recognition by the NIHR and industry should enable us to attract more research to our organisation, so that our patients can benefit from receiving cutting-edge treatments as soon as they become available.”

All the organisations and individuals signing up for the International Clinical Researcher of the Year competition are working in a highly pressurised and cost-conscious environment where there are many other demands on their time and energies. That is why it strives to ensure participants take away much more from the competition than just the recognition of their peers – important though that is as a motivator to excel in the sector.

Mentoring and feedback

One unique feature of the competition is the opportunity for peer-to-peer benchmarking of skills, as well as for highly valuable mentoring and feedback on individual performance from the senior judging panel. “The competition combines a real career-development opportunity with a chance to hone both technical and presentation skills, outside the normal workplace,”

Osmond explains. “It allows interaction with peers as the competition progresses and interaction with judges from different companies if you reach the finals. It really is a complete package.”

Crucially, these features can be aligned with internal training and development objectives. “Training usually carries a significant cost and is not always tailored to the pharmaceutical industry, so these competitions provide a cost-effective alternative,” Quinn comments.

The finals round is “a real development and networking opportunity” for the participants, he adds. “Importantly, this exposure and mentoring from key industry leaders is not only good for them but for their respective companies.”

Participants are interacting with their peers on issues of common concern, in a way that can only encourage the kind of alignment and leadership sought through collaborative initiatives such as TransCelerate BioPharma, the non-profit organisation established by a number of leading pharmaceutical multinationals in 2012.

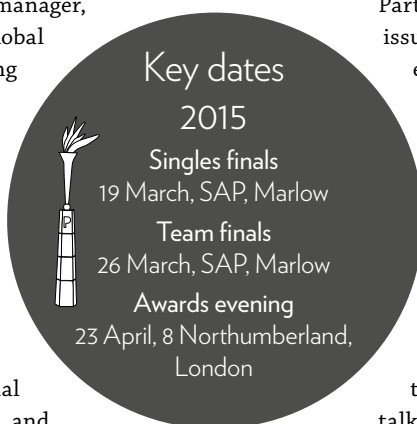
Progress to date with TransCelerate makes clear that the future for productive, streamlined and cost-efficient clinical research lies in a competitive marketplace with players that nonetheless understand when it is better to talk to each other.

As last year’s Team Leader of the Year winner, Greg Trevelyan of Roche Products, points out: “There is always room for individuals to develop and learn from others. The competition provides the ideal environment to facilitate this.”

With one-to-one feedback from judges after the finals, by the end of the competition “these people have become better clinical researchers”, he adds. “This benefits the individuals and their companies, and it leads to improved research standards – which ultimately benefit the patients.” ■



Entry is now open
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Key dates
2015
Singles finals
19 March, SAP, Marlow
Team finals
26 March, SAP, Marlow
Awards evening
23 April, 8 Northumberland,
London