Drug sponsors tread cautiously using social media to aid clinical research

*Highest use in patient recruitment; lowest in adverse event monitoring*

- Nearly all sponsors have developed corporate guidelines to address employee use of social media.
- Drug sponsors widely report concerns about violating patient privacy and confidentiality, jeopardizing research integrity, and influencing study volunteer receptivity to participating in clinical trials.
- Patient recruitment through social media is the most actively piloted area, with sponsors planning to expand use in global markets over the next 12 – 18 months.
- Sponsors believe social media can provide valuable input for development planning and protocol design.
- “Social listening” is receiving growing attention, though sponsors differ widely on the value of this approach.
- Patients are using social media to report adverse events, but few sponsors have developed formal policies and practices to gather and evaluate that information.

Social media—websites and software applications used interactively to communicate and share information—is gaining ground as an important tool to improve the clinical research process through more effective engagement of patient communities. Two factors have hindered adoption. First, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the European Medicines Agency have yet to issue guidelines on social media use in drug development, though earlier this year the FDA issued a draft guidance on the use of social media in product promotion and marketing. Second, the lack of internal company policies and formalized, coordinated processes have kept sponsors from pushing ahead. Instead, many drug companies are using social media in a siloed and experimental fashion.

To better understand how drug sponsors are thinking about, piloting, and utilizing social media in clinical research, Tufts CSDD convened a working group of mid- and large-sized pharmaceutical companies and contract research organizations. This report highlights survey findings and discussions among those companies.