Our Business



Clinical Studies during COVID 19: Creative solutions maintain product development progress

Members of the Product Development team recently presented to the European Medicines Agency and other pharmaceutical industry stakeholders on the challenges of conducting veterinary clinical studies during the pandemic. Attendees were fascinated to learn that the hurdles faced by animal health drug developers were almost identical to those experienced by teams developing human medicines.

When the pandemic struck in March 2020, Dechra had several studies in various stages of completion. It rapidly became apparent that COVID-19 was going to have a significant impact on the conduct of veterinary clinical field studies. Our immediate focus became how to adapt to the changing landscape to deliver on our timelines. For studies just starting, our relationship with sites willing to participate in studies was even more critical because a large list of study sites became unavailable for participation due to their stressed infrastructures as a result of illness, inability to identify critical study materials and/or closing their doors to pet owners. Inevitably, the participating clinics’ first priority was to continue delivering veterinary services to sick animals in the face of lockdowns, while keeping staff and pet owners safe. Leveraging these long established relationships became imperative in asking our sites to take on more work.

As the veterinary world adjusted to new safe working practices, the Dechra teams had to act swiftly due to travel bans and quarantines, and create contingency plans. Study teams built new processes for

training and monitoring, engaging in new ways to communicate and collect data effectively. Frequent and thorough communication was key in addition to accommodating individual study site challenges. Creative

study marketing strategies at targeted clinics best able to continue study related activities and the identification of new study patients were required. Remote oversight and flexibility were important to ensure ongoing patients were not lost from the studies due to missed data or inability to comply with study demands. For critical data points requiring in person observation, study monitors local to the study location were hired to observe procedures for compliance to ensure good study conduct. Management of study drug and biological sample shipments required careful planning and oversight to overcome delays due to unreliable courier schedules.

Prior investment in a robust state of the art secure method to collect, store and review data allowed veterinarians to record patient data online and shift to a completely remote procedure for study oversight and closeout. This ensured that the extremely high level of data quality required for a clinical study was maintained. Paper study documents transitioned to more accessible electronic documents. Some novel process changes required advance discussions with the FDA.

Dechra was nimble enough to navigate through each of the hurdles that COVID-19 created and successfully adapted. Some of these alternative approaches will remain in our toolbox for future studies. Together with the ongoing excellent relationships with our participating veterinary clinics, Product Development delivered on its commitments.

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