

## Three Questions Sean Stanton, Compass Research

CWWeekly presents this feature as a spotlight on issues faced by executives in clinical research. This week, writer Karyn Korieth spoke with Sean Stanton, CEO of Compass Research, which operates three research sites in central Florida. Compass Research was a finalist for the Society for Clinical Research Sites' 2015 Site Patient Recruitment Innovation Award (SPRIA), which recognizes sites that employ innovative patient recruitment strategies.

**Q** Tell us how you used free movie events to educate the community about clinical trials and help recruit volunteers for an Alzheimer's-related study.

**A** Compass Research conducted a study looking at the prevention of memory loss. To qualify, volunteers had to have a genetic marker, found in about two-to-five percent of the population, so we had to mass screen in order to find the right people. We wanted to create awareness among the healthy elderly population about clinical trials, and find a place where the type of person invested in stopping memory loss would congregate on a regular basis.

We hosted a movie event at no cost to patients and their caregivers and showed "Still Alice," which is about someone who develops early-onset Alzheimer's disease. It gave us a platform to discuss the importance of early detection and research in finding a cure. There were some worries about whether people would respond, but when the first movie ad ran, the spots were filled

within the first hour. We had 200 people at the event, and more than 100 people indicated that they were interested in participating in the study. The study doctor, Craig Curtis, M.D., did a presentation before the movie, and when it ended he conducted a question-and-answer session.

The release of the "Still Alice" movie made it easy to discuss the study and the topic of Alzheimer's. We planned other movie events geared to the senior population like "Women in Gold" and "The Second Best Marigold Hotel." They received the same attendance response. Each week the theater location was changed to ensure new



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*Sean Stanton, CEO, Compass Research*

attendees were coming. For every movie, we did a presentation about clinical trials and had a question-and-answer session afterward. Our site is still utilizing this tactic and it continues to be successful.

Compass Research screened 3,000 volunteers in the healthy elderly study over about 18 months, which was triple the goal. During the pre-screen assessment, we talked to them about how clinical trials can make a difference in the world and addressed their fears. If they were not eligible for the memory loss prevention study, some wanted to know about studies for another illness.

**Q** You have been conducting clinical research for more than a decade. What is the best way to address the challenge of recruiting patients for studies?

**A** There is still not enough awareness about the benefits of clinical trials. It's still a foreign topic to patients. If awareness about clinical research came from the primary care or treating physician, you would see a trust level that is significantly higher than what is seen direct-to-consumer. Patients seem to engage faster. We partner with about 45 physicians in our community to make sure that they are aware of the benefits we can provide to their patients. Our outreach and partnerships in the community have become very important. The physicians have the patients and the records. By partnering with them, screen-fail rates can decrease.

We still perform direct-to-consumer recruitment for some populations. Trying to find thousands of people over the course of 18 months is a different initiative than using day-to-day practices. But our initiatives are moving toward creating networks in the community. To me, that's the key. If we are recruiting for an Alzheimer's trial that needs 20 patients, partnerships in the community become the most important piece for successful recruitment.

Most doctors choose medicine as a career because of the science involved, but when they move into daily practice, the science component is often lost. When we connect with doctors to bring science back into practice, they are extremely excited. The best partners are the doctors who are strong patient advocates with a flair for science.

**Q** Are there specific ways that CROs and sponsors could better support sites in patient recruitment efforts?

**A** There is always room for improvement. We need to communicate and test innovative ways of recruiting because it's always evolving. Sometimes we operate in our own lanes and the site, CRO and sponsor don't

communicate enough about what may or may not be working effectively. I would like for us to get together earlier in the study process to look at the best ways to recruit for the individual trial before the protocol is finalized. Sometimes the site, CRO and sponsor have already outsourced to a recruitment firm and haven't talked to us about the best way to

recruit for a specific population. We just get handed their recruitment plan while we are running our own plan. There is no collaboration.

If we could communicate earlier in the recruitment strategy process it could be advantageous for everyone. If there is agreement to the plan in advance—and if it fails—there isn't any finger-pointing. 