

Case Study

OhioHealth's Research Operations Saves Time and Money by working with Western IRB and IRBNet

Summary of an Interview with John Niles, Senior Director at OhioHealth Research & Innovation Institute

Dissatisfied with the electronic IRB research management solution in use since 2007, OhioHealth Research & Innovation Institute set out to find a new solution that would meet its needs for compliance, efficiency, customer service, and cost. OhioHealth's decision to implement IRBNet presented several clear advantages: rapid start up, seamless integration, and elimination of IRB IT investment and ongoing maintenance costs. IRBNet's integrated solution enabled OhioHealth to route their sponsored research to WIRB for best in class review while powering local IRB panel review, all within IRBNet's best-in-class solution.

Background

The OhioHealth Research & Innovation Institute (OhioHealth) oversees research administration and clinical functions for a large, 12 hospital system. It manages approximately 500 industry-sponsored and investigator-initiated trials and employs two internal institutional review boards (IRBs), one of which it uses as a scientific research committee.

After a competitive review process, OhioHealth adopted its first e-IRB Research Management System—an electronic solution to manage their Human Research Protection Program in 2007.

While OhioHealth was initially happy with its new system, some negative features and experiences began to emerge. For example, the new system was local-server-based rather than a cloud-based platform, which not only limited remote access but meant that information technology (IT) resources within the hospital had to be utilized to make periodic system updates. The user interface was cumbersome and staff members found it difficult to search and generate custom reports. The system was also expensive to maintain, requiring an annual maintenance fee of tens of thousands of dollars, plus additional fees for ad hoc requests. Finally, customer service was substandard due to limited office hours and taking days to respond to technical requests.

Transition to WIRB

In 2011, OhioHealth decided to explore transitioning the IRB oversight of its industry-sponsored clinical trials to an independent IRB. The initial impetus was to better align the hospital's research policies and processes with the needs and desires of clinical investigators. These investigators represented OhioHealth clinical leaders with a desire to align with

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industry sponsor preference for central IRB review.

Other factors contributing to the desire to switch to an independent IRB included:

- Rapidly increasing volume and complexity of industry-sponsored clinical trials
- Need to invest in additional regulatory staff to manage the local IRB to accommodate the anticipated growth in trials
- Opportunity to eliminate the disparate structure and processes between its two internal IRBs
- Executive awareness that other hospital systems were trending toward using independent IRBs to deliver the speed and quality required to be competitive in the site selection process.

As a result, OhioHealth's Senior Research Administration visited Western IRB (WIRB) later in the year, and shortly thereafter approved the recommendation to move the organization's industry-study IRB responsibility to WIRB.

Transition to a New Research Management System

As frustrations with its initial e-IRB Research Management System continued to grow, OhioHealth began assessing replacement options in 2016.

Since WIRB was already OhioHealth's preferred provider for industry-sponsored clinical studies, IRBNet was included among the contenders.

	Old System	IRBNet
Duration of Onboarding	6 months	2 months
Customer Service Turnaround	Several days	Same day
Hosting	Institution's server	SaaS-based
Institutional IT Resources	Significant	None
Remote Access?	No	Yes
Annual Fees	\$50-60,000	\$0
One system for industry-sponsored and institutional studies?	No	Yes

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After a competitive review process, OhioHealth selected IRBNet with the following factors as important considerations:

- **A quick, two-month on-boarding process** and excellent customer service, which included same-day turnaround on email queries and assigned personal institutional liaisons.
- **Cost-effective for the institution** - As IRBNet is a software-as-a-service (SaaS) application, no hospital IT resources are required, which provides institutional cost savings and alleviates any IT bottlenecks.
- **Free of charge for WIRB clients.** An important and unique aspect of their solution is that it was available completely free of charge to Ohio Health. The annual fees are waived because WIRB is OhioHealth's chosen preferred partner for the review of new industry-sponsored studies.
- **Ease and convenience of a SaaS-based platform.** As IRBNet is a cloud-based platform that did not sit on the OhioHealth server, implementation was especially easy for both OhioHealth IRBs – thus adding the inter-IRB consistency we needed – and granting all IRB members remote access to their respective system.
- **Customization to Ohio Health processes.** IRBNet also provides a suite of features that permits some customization to meet our additional user needs.

Integration Benefits

OhioHealth receives several additional integration benefits from working with both WIRB and IRBNet. For example, as data are submitted directly to WIRB, OhioHealth IRB Administration can use a single system for both its local IRB and WIRB-reviewed studies without having to develop a shadow file. This feature represents a significant savings in time and effort because all communications are conducted in the same way and there is no need to access a separate portal. It also facilitates robust reporting, allowing similar protocols to be aggregated and timeline metrics tracked.

OhioHealth's entire transition to IRBNet was completed in two months, and the new research management system launched on May 1, 2017.

WCG's IRBNet offered OhioHealth several clear advantages: rapid start up, seamless integration, and no cost.