

CASE STUDY

Site Payment Automation: A Site's Perspective



Elias Research Associates
A New ERA of Clinical Research

“There is a growing frustration around the entire payment process. We had grown our business with the understanding that this was industry standard when it came to payment reconciliation. We took it upon ourselves to just do our best with the situation for our site members.”

*Steve Billingsley, Director of Operations
for Elias*

HOW A CRO'S DECISION TO AUTOMATE SITE PAYMENTS SAVED THOUSANDS

Automating site payments is a growing industry trend, with more sponsors and CROs realizing that by centralizing their payment processes, the administrative burdens related to reconciling payments are dramatically reduced. Payments are executed as they should be - quickly, accurately, without headaches.

With automated site payment solutions, sponsors gain transparency and financial control over their payment processes. CROs who leverage an automated solution reduce the administrative rework, and negative site relationships that are common with manual processes.

Sponsors and CROs adopt these technologies to strengthen their collaboration with their site partners. As the end user and ultimate “beneficiary” of these technologies, it's critical to understand a site's perspective in assessing their value.

In 2015, Elias Research Associates, a research study management organization that serves as a single point of contact for investigators, began receiving payments from their CRO partner through Greenphire's site payment solution, eClinicalGPS. Elias works with more than 300 sites around the country, empowering them to participate in clinical research without administrative burden.

Steve Billingsley, Director of Operations for Elias, along with Phil Billingsley, Director of Business Development, and their team serve as the liaison to strategically partner study sites with top sponsors and CROs to get sites activated quickly and efficiently.

Reconciling payments on behalf of their site members has always been a tremendous time and resource drain on Billingsley and his team. In fact, there was a growing dissatisfaction among their site members around their inability to get paid accurately and efficiently.

When Elias began receiving payments via an automated solution, his team was relieved. Not only were CROs and sponsors recognizing this issue and the impact it was having on the study, but operations were much smoother and easier. There was an almost immediate impact in three key areas: payment accuracy, visibility and timeliness.

Payment Accuracy

Prior to using eClinicalGPS, research sites would send Billingsley and his team an invoice to process for payment from their sponsor or CRO. It was then the CRO's responsibility to match the invoice with what was contractually agreed to. If there were any discrepancies between that invoice and the contract, there would be back and forth between the sponsor or CRO and Billingsley's team. Many times, the site team that negotiated a contract was not the same team that generated the invoice, causing a disconnect in how to clarify and reconcile these gaps in what has been done and what requires payment.

In working with CROs and Sponsors that use eClinicalGPS, the team has nearly eliminated any discrepancies between what can be invoiced and how that aligns with the contract. This entire process has been pre-configured and streamlined to keep the flow of payments accurate. Now, fully compliant invoices can be generated through the system based on the preconfigured contracted agreements, so there are no discrepancies or inaccuracies. Sponsors and CROs are using the same invoice as their site partners.

Payment Visibility

Another challenge that Billingsley and his team saw prior to using eClinicalGPS was that they would receive a payment from their sponsor or CRO partner and have no idea what it was for. This would present an even bigger challenge in their business because they were required to disperse that payment to them within 5 business days of receiving the payment. Navigating who received the funds became a primary role for one person on Billingsley's staff, who could have been otherwise using their skillset for many other more strategic tasks to benefit the team and their site partners.

With eClinicalGPS, each payment that is received is backed with the full details on the protocol name and number, investigator name, and details of each payment line item including subject identifier, visit number, visit date and procedures outlines if the payment is for items outside the visit payment (i.e. storage fee, pharmacy start-up, etc.) or if any items invoiced were denied or delayed for payment.

The reduction in time needed to determine what a payment is for saves Elias nearly 15 percent in resources across the entire team, allowing these team members to focus on their sites' ability to support clinical research – not investigating what payments are for and what is still outstanding.

“Transforming the site payment process provides tangible benefits for all the stakeholders within clinical research, all with the common goal to empower sites and improve operational efficiencies. We have only scratched the surface of our ability to realize these benefits and look forward to seeing this better way to pay become an industry standard.”

Steve Billingsley, Director of Operations for Elias

Payment Turnaround

The efficiencies and transparencies now available in the payment process have eliminated many delays that would occur in receiving payment in a timely manner. Through eClinicalGPS, Elias no longer receives payments via check. Payments are received electronically on a monthly basis, delivering further efficiencies and increased site satisfaction and collaboration.

According to the Society for Clinical Research Sites, research sites struggle with sustainability and many are working with less than three months operating cash. Billingsley fully agrees with this and believes there are a significant number of sites that operate with less than this. The sites Elias partners with are looking to introduce efficiencies, reduce costs and optimize their limited resources in any way they can.

“The limited cashflow at sites is by no means an indication of bad business practices or inability to effectively budget or manage costs,” said Billingsley. “Sites are striving to support increasingly complex trials, deliver a better patient experience and are not receiving compensation in a timely manner to support this demand.”

Faster payments are key to empowering the site community, allowing them to focus on the site experience and research, not chasing down money that is owed to them. Prior to eClinicalGPS, two out of the seven members of the Elias team focused exclusively on site payments, that's nearly 30% of the staff. Now these team members can begin to focus on more strategic accounting and operational improvements that support the organization's commitment to site empowerment as more CROs and Sponsors adopt eClinicalGPS and similar systems.

More of the Elias CRO and sponsor partners are using eClinicalGPS to process payments, so these advantages are being realized on an even larger scale. Billingsley and his team are extremely encouraged by the Sponsor and CRO community's adoption of these solutions and increased focus on the site experience.



Greenphire is the leader in global clinical trial payment solutions. Greenphire's best-in-class solutions optimize clinical trial performance by simplifying and streamlining payment processes from sponsors and CROs to sites and patients. Greenphire's ClinCard® and eClinicalGPS® solutions easily handle any type of trial design and complexity, resulting in more accurate and compliant payments globally for both sites and patients. The choice of industry leaders worldwide, Greenphire provides better performance and better data, resulting in better trials. Learn more at www.greenphire.com.