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Trials See Spike in Social Media, Patient Advocacy and Website Recruitment Approaches

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The utilization of websites for trial recruitment has nearly tripled since 2019, while social media platforms and patient advocacy groups have doubled in use, according to a study that offers new insights into the top recruitment methods used for trials postpandemic, among other data.

The Tufts Center for the Study of Drug Development (CSDD), which assessed nearly 100 mid- to late-stage trials conducted between 2018 and 2023 in oncology, central nervous system/neuroscience, inflammatory, vaccine and cardiovascular/metabolic indications, found that individual trials' recruitment efforts ranged from zero to 14 different strategies and employed 3.8 strategies on average.

Some recruitment tactics have seen a significant increase in usage since the COVID-19 pandemic began, CSDD's latest Impact Report shows, with website-based recruitment in particular growing in prevalence, shooting up from 16 percent in 2019 to 44 percent last year.

Similarly, use of social media platforms increased from 18 percent to 37 percent, recruitment via patient communities/advocacy rose from 11 percent to 23 percent, and chart prescreening doubled from 21 percent to 42 percent. Physician referrals have also grown in use as a pathway to trial participation, increasing from 29 percent to 43 percent, the study found.

The most common recruitment strategies included print materials, such as mail ads and brochures, websites, physician referrals and chart prescreening. Two newer approaches are also being used to recruit patients as of last year: targeted marketing for diversity, equity and inclusion efforts (12 percent of trials) and word of mouth (23 percent of trials).

Recruitment Tactics Used for Clinical Trials in 2019 and 2023

	Share of all studies using tactics	
Tactics	**2019 (N = 81)**	**2023 (N = 98)**
Brochures, mailings, and other print materials	46%	56%
Websites	16%	44%
Physician referrals	29%	43%
Chart pre-screening	21%	42%
Social media	18%	37%
Patient communities/advocacy	11%	23%
Word of mouth	NA	23%
Networking	13%	21%
Grand rounds/meetings with clinical colleagues	5%	14%
Targeted marketing (for DEI*)	NA	12%

*DEI: Diversity, equity and inclusion

Source: Tufts CSDD

The Impact Report shares other useful insights from the center's study as well, including site activation and enrollment rates by region, protocol execution benchmarks by therapeutic area, average enrollment volume and trial completion rates.

Access the latest Impact Report here (https://csdd.tufts.edu/impact-reports).