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CONTACTS: Kevin Boatright, Research and Graduate Studies, (785) 864-7240, kboatright@ku.edu

KU improves efficiency and effectiveness of clinical research studies using automated payment technology

LAWRENCE – Participants in research studies, including medical clinical trials and other projects involving human subjects, typically receive payment for their time and trouble. That means handing out cash or lots of checks for small amounts of money. It also means keeping track of personal information for audit and tax purposes.

Today, all that’s changing at the University of Kansas.

This summer, KU contracted with Greenphire, the leading provider of payment and communication technology solutions for clinical research studies, to implement the company’s ClinCard System. With the ClinCard System, participants in studies are paid in the form of a debit card. This eliminates paper checks and cash transactions, while ensuring greater security and accountability.

“Past practice was not very efficient or secure,” said Linda Sadler, chief financial officer for the KU Center for Research. “It was labor-intensive, and meant we had to collect and safeguard sensitive information in multiple departments, such as the Social Security numbers of participants.”

KU is now using the ClinCard System at the Medical Center and Lawrence campuses. It is among the first major research universities to adopt the system, joining such institutions as the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, the Tufts Medical Center, and the University of Southern California’s Health Research Association.

Gregory S. Kopf, Ph.D., associate vice chancellor of research administration at the KU Medical Center and executive director of the KUMC Research Institute, said, “Our use of the ClinCard System will enhance our clinical research enterprise, not only from a financial perspective, but more importantly from a patient and physician satisfaction perspective.” KUMC conducts more than 100 clinical trials per year. According to Kopf, the ClinCard System could decrease the direct costs associated with the processing of patient payments by nearly 50%.
“The first study to use the system at Lawrence generated more than 700 cards,” said Sadler. “That’s 700 small checks we didn’t have to produce. Plus the subjects’ personal information was all controlled at the researcher level. The central administrative area doesn’t have to deal with safeguarding Social Security numbers and other personal information at all during the payment process. At year-end, we have access to detailed information and can generate all appropriate tax forms, while maintaining security of the data in the Greenphire database. Overall, it is a more secure and flexible methodology from our perspective, is well-received by recipients, and helps facilitate our researchers’ objectives.”

Hugh Catts, professor and chair of the Speech-Language-Hearing Department and a researcher affiliated with the Life Span Institute, was the first to utilize the ClinCard System in a study at KU. “Participants in the study liked the debit cards,” he said, “and it greatly reduced the amount of administrative work required at our end.”

Keeping the participants satisfied is a key to keeping them in the study, said Kopf. When subjects drop out it can reduce the validity of the research.

“The ClinCard System is flexible,” said Kopf. “The subject can use it like cash or download it into an account. You can also add money to the card after subsequent sessions. Many subjects don’t have a bank account, so a debit card has advantages over a check. Compared to cash, having a debit card with a PIN number is also safer for the subject to carry around.”

KUMC recently received a $20 million Clinical and Translational Science award from the National Institutes of Health. Kopf believes the ClinCard System will enhance the operational efficiency of future trials and increase participant satisfaction, while ensuring regulatory and research protocol compliance.


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