

CANCER TREATMENT STARTS

WITH CLINICAL TRIALS

Zena Smith and Altair Silva discuss their experience working in clinical trial recruitment for cancer research, along with the disparities that impact cancer patients of color and underrepresented communities.



ZENA SMITH



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**SPECTRUM
SCIENCE**

What is your experience working in clinical trial recruitment (CTR) for cancer research?

**ZENA
SMITH**

I've been in patient recruitment for 19 years. Clinical trials are essential to cancer care and current cancer research data are needed to develop benchmarks and set the stage for improvement.

**ALTAIR
SILVA**

I've worked in patient recruitment for cancer research for 15 years, supporting several studies for prostate, breast, lung and lymphoma cancers, among many others.



What challenges have you seen while recruiting for cancer trials?

ZS

Fewer than 5% of eligible adult cancer patients enroll in clinical trials—even less for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) and older populations. Some challenges include fear of a reduced quality of life, drug and side effect concerns, negative perceptions of clinical trials, logistics, access to clinical trial opportunities, inconveniences, healthcare professionals (HCPs) distrust, feeling coerced and loss of control over treatment decisions.

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One of the biggest challenges is how to best inform and educate cancer patients and their loved ones about potential studies. Helping patients and their networks understand the journey of a trial can be complex. Diversifying and innovating how we communicate can be instrumental in helping patients and their loved ones better understand what studies are trying to accomplish.

“There are racial differences in the genetic makeup of cancers, so it’s important to advance genomic profiling and clinical trials to further understand and care for BIPOC patients.”



How can companies diversify their candidate pool for trials?

Diversity should be a consideration throughout the entire clinical research process, from design to recruitment to implementation. Strategies to increase participant diversity include:

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- Select investigator sites that reflect the diverse nature of the patient population
- Partner with advocacy groups, faith and community-based organizations in trial areas
- Expand eligibility criteria to increase BIPOC enrollment
- Increase trial participation in rural areas and cities that are geographically close to affected populations of color
- Use telemedicine to expand to underrepresented areas
- Ensure trial content and resources are translated and culturally adapted by native speakers and then reviewed, validated and certified
- Include a robust transportation assistance program to improve the participant experience

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Why is it important to you to close the inequity gaps in CTR?

ZS

My mother passed away from breast cancer at the age of 35, so my mission to close these gaps is very personal. Breast cancer is the most diagnosed cancer in Black women, who are also less likely to receive adequate screening, leading to late diagnoses.

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As a Latinx immigrant, I understand how lack of representation can impact new, effective treatment options for people like me. I'm a caregiver to family members fighting cancer and experience inequity in our care—that's why this work has become even more important to me.



What is the future of CTR, especially for cancer trials?

ZS

I think we can expect to see greater advances in cancer clinical trials due to novel therapies and targeted treatments enabled by genomics. There will be more individualized patient data and new technologies that incorporate AI and natural language processing to give clinical trial leaders a better way to match a patient with a therapy or trial.

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There are several groups looking at how drug development can improve representation across every facet of research. I see cancer trials becoming more diverse, equitable and inclusive and cancer patients from all walks of life having a stronger voice and sense of belonging in trials.

ZENA SMITH and **ALTAIR SILVA** are Vice Presidents at Spectrum Science, an integrated marketing, communications and media agency hyper-focused on science. Their day-to-day focuses on connecting with targeted patient populations to drive awareness of clinical studies and drive enrollment action.