Clinical Trials in BC Roundtable
Summary

British Columbia Rallies to Accelerate Clinical Trials: A Collaborative Push for Innovation

British Columbia is poised for a significant transformation in its clinical trials landscape, following a pivotal roundtable event co-hosted by Clinical Trials British Columbia and GSK Canada. Key decision-makers from across the province, including representatives from the BC Ministry of Health and all five health authorities, converged to address a critical challenge: boosting BC's competitiveness as a leading destination for medical research. The consensus from the October 21 gathering was clear: by streamlining processes, fostering greater collaboration, and embracing transparency, British Columbia can unlock its full potential, bringing life-changing treatments to patients faster.

The Urgency for Change

While British Columbia boasts world-class scientific expertise and facilities, the province currently lags other Canadian jurisdictions in attracting industry-sponsored clinical trials. Data from a recent Health Research BC situational analysis reveals a stark contrast: BC receives approximately $8 per capita in industry funding, compared to $21-$24 in Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec.

GSK Canada's own experience underscores this disparity. Despite a recent increase in GSK trials in BC, the province still accounts for only 25% of our Canadian clinical trial placements, significantly less than Ontario (90%) and Quebec (74%). A major contributing factor is the often-protracted start-up times. While BC's median start-up time stands at 23 weeks, many studies can extend beyond 45 weeks. This is notably slower than the Canadian median of 17.5 weeks, and a far cry from GSK's internal stretch target of 15 weeks, or the ambitious goals of Ontario (6.5 weeks) and Quebec (8 weeks).

"The current timelines present a real barrier," noted a GSK Canada representative at the event. "We know BC has incredible potential, but the speed at which trials can get off the ground directly impacts where global pharmaceutical companies choose to invest. We believe that by working together, we can overcome these hurdles."

Breakthrough Discussions, Concrete Actions

The roundtable provided a vital platform for frank discussion, allowing participants to delve into specific operational challenges and co-create solutions. Four key areas emerged as central to accelerating trial initiation:

1. **Research Ethics Approvals:** Discussions highlighted the need to significantly reduce ethics approval timelines, particularly in complex areas like oncology. Inspirations were drawn from successful models in other provinces, such as the streamlined ethics review systems in Québec and Ontario. The potential for pre-approved Informed Consent Form (ICF) templates – a practice that has dramatically cut timelines in other regions – and even the application of AI in reviews, were enthusiastically explored.
2. **Legal Agreements:** Streamlining legal frameworks was identified as crucial. Participants explored the adoption of non-study specific Confidential Disclosure Agreements (CDAs), which GSK already employs successfully across Atlantic Canada, to expedite information sharing. The concept of a provincial Clinical Trial Agreement (CTA) was also put forward to standardise and accelerate contract negotiations.
3. **Budget Harmonisation:** Addressing the significant variability in procedure costs and site fees across BC institutions was a key focus. While acknowledging regional cost differences, the group explored the development of institutional or therapeutic-specific rate cards. The goal is to ensure fair market value and bring much-needed predictability to budget negotiations, which can currently take up to 10 months for some studies.
4. **Governance and Coordination:** A strong business case for investing in clinical trials was deemed essential to secure leadership buy-in. This case would underscore the direct benefits to patient care – providing access to cutting-edge treatments – and the significant economic return on public investment. Participants also discussed integrating industry perspectives more formally into BC's clinical trial governance models, drawing lessons from successful structures in other provinces.

A Shared Vision for the Future

The collaborative spirit of the roundtable culminated in a shared commitment to a faster, more coordinated, and competitive clinical trial ecosystem in BC. Fourteen concrete action items were identified, complete with initial points of contact and timelines, signalling a determined path forward. These actions range from advocating for resources with institutional executive boards to exploring advanced data capture for identifying bottlenecks.

"This roundtable was more than just a discussion; it was a call to action," said Alison Orth, Director, Clinical Trials British Columbia. "The commitment from the participants to work together and implement these changes is truly inspiring. We are building a future in British Columbia that improves patient access to innovative treatments."

Clinical Trials British Columbia is committed to leading a coordinated effort and will continue to monitor and report on progress and lead, collaborate or partner to advance the actions.

GSK Canada remains optimistic and fully committed to this collaborative journey. By strengthening BC's clinical trial infrastructure, attracting greater investment, and ultimately bringing more innovative treatments to patients, we are uniting science, technology, and talent to get ahead of disease together, benefiting patients across British Columbia and beyond.

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