Investigator Payments – A Critical Component in Bayer's Sponsor of Choice Strategy

How automating site payments and invoice resolution can enable sponsors to pay sites two to three times faster, eliminate end-of-study reconciliation, and reduce time spent supporting payment processes by up to 90%.

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INTRODUCTION

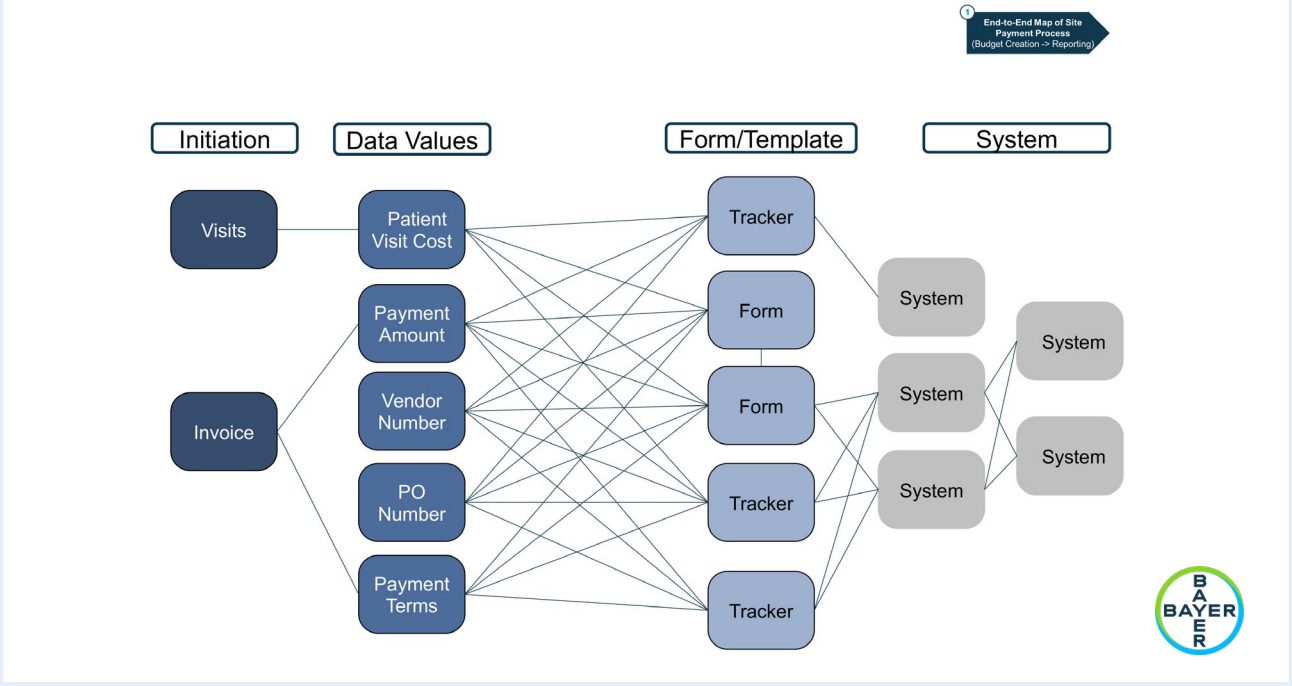
Year after year, slow and unpredictable investigator payments continue to be a top complaint from clinical study sites. For this reason, Bayer initiated a project called Automated Site Payment Invoice Resolution (ASPIREs), through which Bayer realized two ambitious goals of optimizing the clinical trial site payment process and enabling site management teams to focus more on value-added activities. The project kicked off in 2019 with a pilot in the United States, followed by a roll out in six additional countries. As of today, Bayer has rolled out ASPIREs into 18 countries across the globe.

The ASPIREs project produced numerous benefits for Bayer and partner sites, which include:

- Improved site satisfaction through timely, accurate payments and reduced disputes
- Increased transparency through real-time invoicing and site payment status reporting
- Reduced administrative burden through automated third-party services and dashboards
- Reduced time to market through better site management efficiencies.

The first step in the ASPIREs project was an engagement with EY consultants to assess Bayer's current-state payment

Figure 1: Systems analysis: invoicing and site payment.



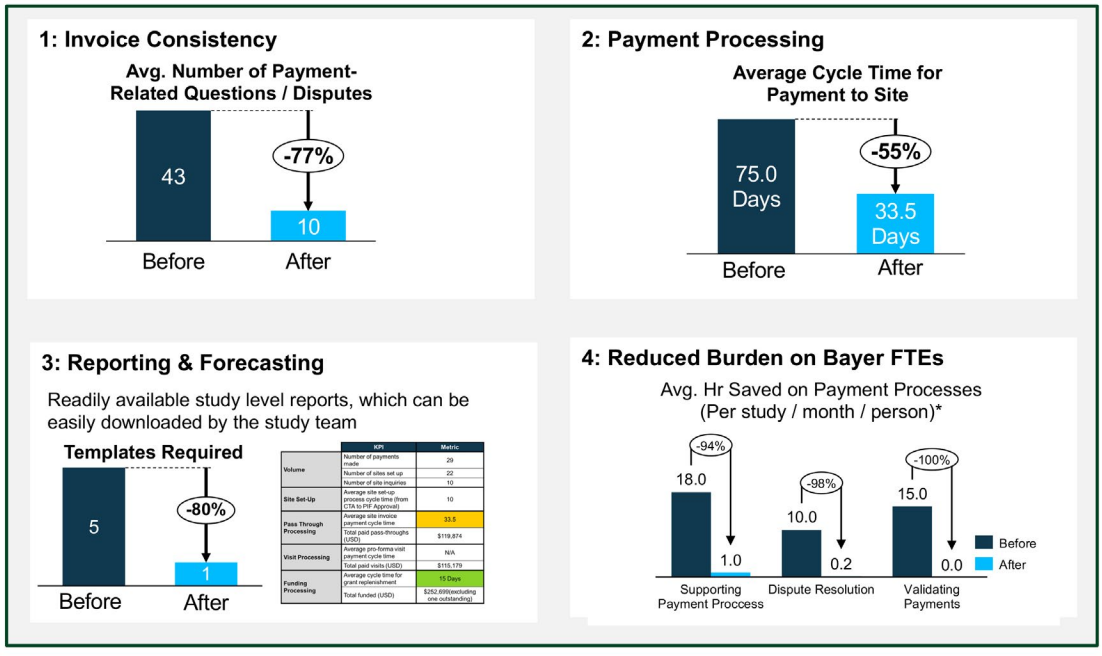
processes in the US. Over a three-month period, processes were mapped from budget creation through reporting to identify key challenges and opportunities. Each step and every team member were tracked. The results confirmed a high degree of inefficiency and a startling "spider-web" of touchpoints (FIGURE 1).

Five key pain points were identified:

- **Task duplication:** Approximately 73% of templates required duplicative data entry, and there was an average of five functional groups required per process area.
- **Manual processes:** Approximately 80% of steps in the process were manual, and 84% of data was manually transferred across systems and templates.
- **No real-time reporting:** The current-state process was marked by an inability to utilize and analyze data. Therefore, large, unexpected costs impacted reporting and site cash flow.
- **Disparate data sources:** Twelve separate systems were utilized, with 75% of the data and templates saved in multiple places across teams.
- **Lack of standardization:** There was a high degree of variation in vendor names and activities across systems, and 68% of the data was duplicated with variations in different templates and systems.

Not surprisingly, clinical trial sites reported that end-of-trial reconciliation was a lengthy, burdensome, and frustrating process. Armed with this current-state process knowledge, Bayer partnered with IQVIA Technologies to develop a future-state solution. In the pilot rollout, ASPIREs was a resounding

Figure 2: Benchmark against key program objectives.



success according to the key performance indicators of invoice consistency, payment processing time, reporting and forecasting capabilities, and employee administrative burden (FIGURE 2).

For an in-depth understanding of how a fully automated payments solution for clinical trial sites can make the difference in becoming a sponsor of choice, *Applied Clinical Trials* (ACT) hosted a roundtable discussion, sponsored by IQVIA Technologies, to review the latest updates on Bayer's ASPIREs project as it rolls out to nearly 20 countries. The project teams from Bayer and IQVIA Technologies talked about the importance of working both domestically and internationally to maximize automation and transparency, and detailed the benefits achievable for sponsors from a solution that gets sites paid quickly and reliably.

Participants in the ACT Webcast were:

- Lisa Henderson (Moderator), Editorial Director, ACT
- Mark Ryan, Vice President, Head of Site Management Americas, Bayer Healthcare
- Geri Masessa, Director, Resource Management, Bayer Healthcare
- Stuart Thiede, VP and Global Head, IQVIA Financial Lifecycle Solutions, IQVIA Technologies

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPONSOR OF CHOICE

THIEDE (IQVIA TECHNOLOGIES): **Why is sponsor of choice important to Bayer?**

RYAN (BAYER): We here at Bayer firmly believe that we are an equal partner with our sites. We know that sites are not working for us or under us; rather, we are all working together for our clinical trials to be successful and to ultimately get new

medications to patients as fast as possible. We believe that the processes we present to sites are a critical piece to being successful. If our processes are highly frustrating for sites to manage, it makes it difficult for sites to embrace our trials. Our goal is to reduce administrative burden as much as possible, and we are committed to the necessary processes that make us a sponsor of choice.

UNDERSTANDING THE PAIN POINTS IN CURRENT PAYMENT PROCESSES

THIEDE (IQVIA TECHNOLOGIES): **We at IQVIA Technologies have seen that site payments are strongly impacted by upstream and potentially even downstream processes. Why did Bayer decide to start with the payments part of the end-to-end process?**

RYAN (BAYER): As part of Bayer's commitment to being a sponsor of choice, several years ago we solicited direct feedback from sites themselves about how we could reduce their administrative burden. Among the more startling pieces of information that we learned is that many, perhaps even the majority, of sites actually operate in the negative financially during a clinical trial. This is simply unacceptable. Sites deserve to be paid in a timely fashion for the work that they have completed. After implementing ASPIREs, the payment process is much more intuitive, transparent, and efficient. Payments are currently on a 28-day cycle in the US, meaning that sites are getting paid within 28 days of the date that the data is pulled from the electronic data capture system.

Another data point that guided us in the direction of payments was the Society for Clinical Research Sites (SCRS) survey data showing that the invoicing process for payments was listed consistently among the top three processes that are a burden for clinical trial sites. In response, ASPIREs has streamlined our invoicing process and eliminated this type of guesswork, greatly reducing the questions, comments, and concerns from sites about payments.

MASESSA (BAYER): When I started with the company, I was the US controller, and we were still doing our accruals with a spreadsheet. The contrast between that manual, home-grown process and the IQVIA Clinical Trial Payments solution is striking.

In our Payments Portal, the study sponsor and the site administrators can drill down on every single payment all the way down to the banking information of when a payment went out, where that payment went, and what it was for. This helps eliminate most queries from sites about payments.

On a wider scale, one of the unexpected benefits we found from mapping out the entire current-state process end to end is that we saw the critical touchpoints all the way from how the clinical trial agreements are worded, to how the budget and protocol are set up. These connections had never come to surface before because Bayer was doing everything manually. When we invested the time and effort into mapping out the end-to-end process, it really opened our eyes to how we could improve everything from contracting on the front end to compliance reporting at the back end.

Our internal staff are very happy because so much of the labor that used to be devoted to administrative payment tasks is now completely automated.

CHOOSING FEATURES IN A SITE PAYMENTS SOLUTION

THIEDE (IQVIA TECHNOLOGIES): **We have discussed the importance of being a sponsor of choice, and we have talked about the benefits of mapping the current-state site payments process end-to-end. Now let's explore the approach Bayer took when selecting the right solution based on the challenges you were able to uncover. What were the most important features you looked for in a site payments solution?**

RYAN (BAYER): The most important feature to us was that the system had to be user friendly and require no training. Training consumes time and resources, and these costs are compounded by the fact that every sponsor uses a slightly different system. Bayer's position was that any solution we selected had to be as intuitive as online shopping or banking. The IQVIA Clinical Trial Payments solution met this requirement flawlessly. The dashboard allows us to pull up a study list and drill down easily into all payments made for the study by site. For example, we can pull up Dr. Jones and see that he was paid three times. We can see how much he was paid, what he was paid for, and how quickly he was paid. If a payment is outstanding, we can see why it is outstanding. It really is a very powerful system, and no training is required.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS WITH IMPLEMENTATION OUTSIDE THE US

THIEDE (IQVIA TECHNOLOGIES): **The pendulum has swung in terms of what percentage of clinical trials and sites are outside the US. How does automating payments outside of the US compare with your US pilot and roll-out?**

MASESSA (BAYER): The first step we took before introducing the new processes to international sites was to really listen to our international partners to understand their challenges as well as the underlying reasons and causes. Having IQVIA as a partner enabled us to be flexible with our solutions. The vast majority of countries have been able to benefit fully from the automated IQVIA Clinical Trial Payments solution with minor adjustments. However, we do have three countries that have very complex requirements and regulations, and with those countries we chose to take a hybrid approach to the payments process by retaining some manual elements.

SOLICITING FEEDBACK INTERNALLY AND FROM SITE PARTNERS

THIEDE (IQVIA TECHNOLOGIES): **How have internal staff and staff at partner sites reacted?**

MASESSA (BAYER): Our internal staff are very happy because so much of the labor that used to be devoted to administrative payment tasks is now completely automated. They are particularly pleased with the fact that the IQVIA Clinical Trial Payments solution performs a rolling reconciliation each month, so the closeout process for payments is

much simpler. Our US partner sites are also highly satisfied. One key factor in the level of partner site satisfaction is that we asked for (and they provided) feedback about how the portal could be further improved. The IQVIA Technologies team has been quickly responsive to those requests.

Internationally, we have continued our learning curve, and I can tell you that the IQVIA team has all but stood on their heads assisting Bayer with some of the more complex situations we encountered. They have truly done everything possible to work with each country. We have received a good deal of positive feedback. We do plan to do a formal survey of both US and international sites within 2021 to gather official satisfaction data, but the informal feedback is very encouraging.

LESSONS LEARNED IN ADDRESSING SITE PAYMENTS CHALLENGES

THIEDE (IQVIA TECHNOLOGIES): **What advice do you have for other companies that want to address their site payments challenges?**

RYAN (BAYER): My advice is to focus not only on payments, but the entire, current-state, end-to-end process. If there are other sponsor companies out there that think their processes are too complex to map out or too complex for the IQVIA Clinical Trial Payments solution, it maybe a comfort for them to know that we at Bayer also have complicated and complex processes, but the team did a great job making it work. Lastly, if you feel that your sponsor company has too many international sites for this type of solution to be viable, we want to encourage you to see all the advantages of working with IQVIA Technologies. Their international experience and expertise allow them to adapt the system to meet the needs of sites across many countries.

SUMMARY

With sponsors and contract research organizations competing for clinical trial sites, becoming a sponsor of choice is more important than ever before. Sites consistently report that they are overburdened with payment systems that are complicated and require enormous investments of time in training and administration. Further, sites are operating in the negative financially during trials and must parse a complicated manual reconciliation process at the completion of the trial.

To become a sponsor of choice, the clear message that arose from this *Applied Clinical Trials* roundtable is the importance of investing time and resources into understanding the needs of both sponsor and clinical trial sites, and then selecting a payments solution to meet these challenges. The Bayer and IQVIA Technologies payments teams highlighted the importance of working both domestically and internationally to maximize automation and transparency, reduce manual data handling, pay sites two to three times faster, eliminate end-of-study reconciliation, and reduce time spent supporting payment processes by up to 90%.