



## LEVERAGING SOUND GRANT PAYMENT PRACTICES TO ENHANCE SPONSOR-SITE RELATIONSHIPS

One of the world's leading pharmaceutical companies, AstraZeneca offers a broad range of medicines that are designed to fight disease in important areas of health care. In fact, the company focuses specifically on six therapeutic areas: cancer, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, infection, neuroscience and respiratory and inflammation. With corporate offices in London, the company has over 67,000 employees. Among those are about 13,000 at 17 principal research and development centers in eight countries — including the United States.

When Ellis Wilson assumed the role of Senior Director for Study Delivery in the United States in 2006, his Study Delivery Leaders (SDLs) made something very clear: “They told me, ‘If you don’t do anything else in your new job, please find a better approach to managing and executing investigator payments. That’s a job that’s driving us crazy. We’re not accountants, and it takes an enormous amount of our time.’”

It was a request that Wilson took very seriously — and ultimately addressed through an innovative outsourced solution that has revolutionized the way investigator grant payments are managed in the United States.

### SITUATION

Wilson invested significant time in understanding the current approach to handling investigator grant payments. He also sought to identify best practices that were already in use. He soon discovered that across the United States, most of the company’s SDLs were handling this business process the same way.

“They were using Microsoft® Excel spreadsheets or other less-than-optimal platforms for tracking investigator payments,” Wilson explains. “These were largely manual processes that were prone to error and lacked good controls.”

Wilson then reached out to others in the industry and quickly

### SITUATION

- Lack of standardized processes and systems for managing investigative site grant payments
  - Manual, paper-based financial processes a burden to Study Delivery Leaders (SDLs)
- Inefficient processes often cause negative impact to study focus and deliverables, and breed dissatisfaction at the site level
- Ongoing goal of positioning AstraZeneca as a “sponsor of choice” to support site recruitment and retention while enhancing investigator relationship management
- The need to address financial reporting and compliance
  - Increasing pressures to control costs and manage spend
  - Growing burden on finance, operations and data management to meet increasing compliance reporting demands, such as State Gift Laws, Sarbanes-Oxley and Office of the Inspector General (OIG) requirements
  - Existing systems not conducive to efficient financial reporting and compliance management

### SOLUTION

- Outsource grant payment management to Clinical Financial Services (CFS), a focused provider offering expertise, processes and technologies for the financial management of clinical trials

### RESULTS

- Ability for SDLs to focus on their core financial operations chores
- Consistent, automated grant payment processes that enable AstraZeneca to pay sites biweekly — a significant competitive advantage
- Enhanced financial visibility, which helps the company better control costs while addressing compliance reporting demands

realized these challenges were not unique to AstraZeneca: “It wasn’t us,” he notes. “It’s everybody. Everyone was using these variations on a ‘home-cooking’ theme to track and manage investigator payments.”

Meanwhile, a contact from AstraZeneca’s contracts department gave Wilson a lead on a solution provider — Clinical Financial Services (CFS). In talking with the team at CFS, Wilson says he realized the firm offered a unique blend of financial and clinical trials expertise.

What’s more, he says he began to recognize an opportunity to go beyond simply addressing that high-priority request from his SDLs.

“It became clear that not only were they likely to do a good job with payments, but we could also make investments in such a way that this could become a competitive differentiator,” Wilson explains. “I became interested in going beyond my initial goal of just finding a way to let our Study Delivery Leaders focus on their core competencies. I started to think we could do that — and make a step change in the way investigators were paid.”

## SOLUTION

Recognizing that change can be challenging, Wilson collaborated with CFS on an initial pilot: “We identified a moderately sized study that would provide a good, rigorous test for this new approach and platform,” he says.

Wilson says that CFS got off to a strong start, and the SDL for that study found herself with much more time to devote to the business of running a study team and starting a clinical trial.

Even before that initial pilot was completed, Wilson’s team worked with AstraZeneca’s strategic sourcing team and developed a master services agreement that would allow other SDLs to engage the support of CFS. Additionally, the company’s treasury department and CFS developed a process that would allow AstraZeneca to hold on to its funds for

as long as possible while still paying sites promptly.

Meanwhile, Wilson says that demand for CFS services kept heating up; there was no need to “mandate” use among SDLs: “Once our SDLs understood the advantages of working with CFS, they started voting with their feet,” he explains. “They began actively requesting support from CFS.”

Today, CFS is managing investigator grant payments for numerous AstraZeneca studies in the United States, and talks are underway about expanding these outsourced capabilities globally.

## RESULTS

In reflecting on progress to date, Wilson remarks that it’s amazing that the “old way” of managing clinical trial finances has persisted for so long.

“The old way of doing business relies on simplistic, sluggish systems to deliver investigator payments in clinical trials — an area that is otherwise very sophisticated,” he notes.

Of course, for many of AstraZeneca’s U.S. studies, the “old way” has been replaced with a new, better approach. Indeed, in working with CFS, AstraZeneca has deployed a breakthrough approach to investigator grant payment management. The results:

- SDLs are freed from the burden of financial operations processes — giving them more time to focus on the business of initiating and running studies.
- Investigative sites enjoy biweekly electronic payments that include detailed explanations of what’s covered by each payment — making it easier to manage cash flow and allocate costs.
- In addition to being positioned as a “sponsor of choice,” AstraZeneca benefits from financial management and reporting that’s more accurate and timely, making it easier to address compliance requirements.

