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Partnering to Advance Human Health

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Comparator sourcing

The challenge of compliantly and cost-effectively navigating global supply chains

Supply With Care™



Almac Clinical Services

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Introduction

The clinical trials landscape has evolved rapidly over the last decade. Growing in scale and complexity, today's typical phase III study involves an average of 34 countries[i].

However, globalisation has made the various components of the clinical supply chain more difficult to effectively manage and therefore more susceptible to risk. The challenge of compliantly and cost-effectively navigating global supply chains, often involving high-value, temperature-sensitive products, has never been greater.

The growing volume of studies and increasing 'need for speed' in clinical trial management is symptomatic of a highly competitive biopharmaceutical marketplace. As is the growing utilisation of comparator drugs that provide sponsors with the ability to – in an ideal world – demonstrate an Investigational Medicinal Product's (IMP) enhanced efficacy and tolerability over the best performing, commercially available alternative.

With an estimated two-thirds of clinical trials involving the use of comparators (and co-therapies)[ii] use of comparator products in clinical trials is now a prerequisite for formulary listing and occasionally, for successful licensure too.

Almac Clinical Services has a successful 20-year record of embracing best practice to procure comparator drug for thousands of clinical trials across the globe. In this eBook, we will explore the growing significance of comparator product use, typical sourcing models and the common pitfalls sponsors should look to avoid. We will also offer expert insight into developing a strategic, best practice approach to comparator sourcing that promotes positive patient experience, while minimising risk.

i Grand View Research: Clinical Trial Supplies Market Analysis 2018 - 2025
ii Tracking Trial Cost Drivers: The Impact of Comparator Drugs and Co-Therapies. PharmExec.com.



Video: Comparator sourcing SME

Comparator Vs Placebo

Comparator drugs, sometimes referred to as reference drugs, are most commonly used in phase II and III clinical trials to compare and evaulate performance of a new IMP in several key areas, including efficacy, safety, ease of use and patient compliance.

Placebos are inactive representations of IMP formulations, utilised to remove psychosomatic effects from statistical analysis. From a processing perspective, placebos can be broken down into two categories:

- Placebo to Match – the physical aspects, such as the dimensions and colour, remain visually identical to the active product.
- True Placebo – the physical aspects, as well as the formulation (minus the active component) and manufacturing process remains identical to the active product.

Placebo-based studies previously represented the status quo. However, ethical questions surrounding denying patients medication that could potentially improve quality of life and/or extend life expectancy has prompted a shift.

When it's clearly unethical to use placebos, in oncology-based studies for example, comparator drugs provide sponsors with a benchmark to measure IMP efficacy, without putting patients at risk.



Resource

Why do comparator trials matter?

Routes to Comparator Sourcing

An effective comparator sourcing strategy starts with asking the right questions – informed by a deep understanding of the technical side of supply chain management, as well as trial-specific knowledge. The answers to which will help sponsors to create and develop workable solutions to challenges that arise throughout the lifecycle of the project and facilitate smart decision making.

By taking a strategic, bigger-picture approach to comparator sourcing - and asking the right questions during the planning stages of a clinical trial supply - risk can be identified early, proactive tactics can be implemented that provide confidence in the oversight of the trial's performance and tighter control over budgets. A list of initial questions sponsors looking to initiate a comparator sourcing project should consider is outlined below.

Once these questions have been thoroughly considered, requirements understood and supply challenges identified, a comparator sourcing strategy will need to be selected to best meet the needs of the trial, assuring seamless supply, balancing both risk and cost.

- What drug do I need?
- Is generic suitable
- What strength/dosage forms are available
- When do I need them?
- What ancillaries do I need?
- What countries will the trial be run in?
- Can I centralise my sourcing?
- How much do I need?
- What documentation do I need?
- What regulations and customs requirements do I need to be aware of
- Are there likely to be any availability constraints?
- Are there expiration constraints?
- Is drug used as an AMP



Resource

Options for Comparator Sourcing Procurement

Resource

Approaches to Comparator Sourcing Strategy

Personalised comparator sourcing - top tips for avoiding common pitfalls

Consider all options, don't just go for the most obvious

The world is a big place and while it may seem logical to source comparator product from a country where a study is taking place, it isn't necessarily the right or most cost-effective option. Comparator products can often be found at a lower price point by looking further afield but bear in mind this approach may require additional compliance-based paperwork or confirmatory testing to ensure drugs meet the trial's protocol requirements.

Be prepared to move the goal posts

Owing to a plethora of reasons, from general shortages in supply through to restrictions on use in clinical trials or a mid-study ban on export due to political disruption in the country where a comparator is being sourced; sometimes the goal posts move and sponsors must adapt quickly and effectively or risk bringing supply chains to a grinding halt.

Include comparator sourcing in the bigger picture

It's all too easy to approach comparator sourcing as a bolt-on element of clinical supply chain management and to take a cost Vs value approach to procurement and management. Yet, to reduce risk, comparator sourcing must be interwoven within the bigger picture of the supply chain. People need to be incentivised to work as one team and all key factors – from enrolment to drug expiry - must be considered to assure continuous resupply throughout the study lifecycle, while mitigating the risk of overage and waste.

Understand the need for sensitivity when surveying sourcing channels

If comparator products are in short supply, it may feel prudent to approach a combination of suppliers at the same time to source the quantities required to assure supply. However, this can sometimes make a bad situation worse by inflating product demand, making competitors aware that a comparative trial is underway or about to commence, leading to manufacturers blocking or delaying access to the much-needed product.

Don't forget about ancillary components

Comparator sourcing strategies must not be limited to the drug itself but must also consider the sourcing of co-medication and ancillary supplies, like infusion kits, needles, tubing, oral dispensers, sharps provisions, syringes and adaptors.



Case study

Agility and expertise combine to overcome late stage design issues in comparator study

Expect the unexpected

As with all aspects of clinical trials management, early planning is key to success. Waiting until a clinical trial is already underway before fully scoping a comparator sourcing strategy can compromise the efficiency of the entire operation and put patient safety on the line.

While it can be common for unforeseen circumstances to unfold once a comparator sourcing strategy is defined and operational, risk assessing the situation from top to bottom during a trial's planning phase will limit the impact these unexpected challenges can have. It will also prepare and empower sponsors to adapt with speed, agility and precision to assure continuous resupply to patients and meet key study milestones.



Resource

Expect the unexpected – a checklist

Case study

Political disruption risks loss of access to comparator drug for phase II open label study

Best practice comparator sourcing to deliver success

Taking a best practice approach to comparator sourcing requires timely planning and in-depth research to capture a study's unique requirements, identify potential challenges and design appropriate sourcing strategies and processing protocols that assure supply to patients and keep trial timelines on track.

The gold standard in comparator sourcing is to source directly from the comparator's marketing authorisation holder / originator, through a partnership with a procurement/clinical supply chain specialist that benefits from an established relationship with the manufacturer. Through this partnership, sponsors may obtain visibility over what is available in each market (based on the different formulations, presentations, strengths and brands) and create enhanced insight over access and availability (expiration, lead times and licensing) to streamline and safeguard supply.

Partnering with a trusted and knowledgeable provider of clinical supply chain management will limit the risks associated with commercial drug procurement and enable sponsors to respond effectively to challenges that threaten comparator access. It will also provide reassurance that all associated documentation and compliance management is appropriately dealt with.

Selecting the best model to work with a vendor will depend upon exact requirements but typically can be grouped into three categories:

- A **transactional and reactive model** puts greater emphasis on the sponsor to manage demand but limits upstream visibility. Led by the sponsor, this approach maybe limited to open market supply at the time, meaning this could be a high risk strategy to follow as the comparator required may not be available when needed. However, it can minimise cash flow commitments for the sponsor.
- By contrast, a **consultative and proactive model** is led by a single vendor and informed by enrolment and site activity. This model limits risk (wastage and overage) and requires minimal financial outlay.
- A **hybrid model** is typically used for more complex studies, particularly when recruitment outperforms projections and gaps in supply need to be urgently plugged.

Case study

Leveraging global relationships in response to comparator drug discontinuation delivers study on time and on budget

About Almac Clinical Services

Almac Clinical Services currently provides services to over 600 pharmaceutical and biotech companies worldwide, including 18 of the top 20 global pharma companies. Guided by our extensive clinical supply experience and expertise, we are recognised as one of the leading, multi-faceted, global solution providers within the niche and complex market of clinical trial supply.

Utilising our best in house supply chain management expertise, custom designed services and software solutions, we offer the most flexible approach to support the delivery of your global clinical trial from protocol right through to patient delivery.

Successfully supplying comparator and support medication, via dedicated procurement teams in the UK, USA and APAC regions, while cultivating a fully audited and approved network of global supply partners, you can trust Almac to assure comparator supply to patients enrolled in your clinical trial.



With Almac on your side, you can expect:

- A comprehensive assessment of your needs
- Dedicated Key Account support / managers
- Large scale coverage of key global markets and support for all product types
- Global capabilities for comparator sourcing, supportive medication, as well as components for clinical studies
- Secure supply and a robust supply chain
- Full documentation and support
- Access to our supply chain management services to manage supplies and operational efficiencies for global programs
- Biological product specialists

Case study

Expert project management and comparator sourcing delivers complex global trial

Because with everything we do, we

Supply With Care™

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