

Recruiting Participants Not Part of Your Patient Population: Best Practices & Tips for Recruitment

Overall Best Practices

Whether you are an OHSU team looking to recruit from outside your patient population or an external team looking to recruit OHSU patients, it can be tricky to communicate with individuals you have no relationship with. These patients are unknown to you and not your clinic population and you are not a part of their healthcare team or possibly institution. It can be a complicated situation to navigate.

Below are general best practices to consider when recruiting patients from outside your patient population using a patient list received from an EHR-based tool. Please refer to the remaining document for situation specific best practices.

1. **Put Yourself in their Shoes** – When developing your recruitment plan and materials, begin by putting yourself in their position. How would you feel if someone you did not know, did not receive care from, and potentially not associated with your healthcare organization, received your personal information and contacted you about a research study they think you are eligible for based on their access to that personal information? It can be a startling and worrisome situation when an unknown person is contacting you with your PHI. Therefore, start recruitment by thinking from their point of view and create and communicate from this place.
2. **Confirm Eligibility before Contacting** - Once you receive your dataset, it is strongly recommended to use Epic to perform a chart review and prescreen the patients listed there to ensure individuals meet the expected criteria for your query. You should only be contacting patients that you have confirmed eligibility for.
 - If you are an external site receiving an OHSU patient list, your OHSU co-investigator should perform the chart review/prescreen prior to releasing the dataset to you.
3. **No Cold Calling** – As these are individuals unknown to you, who do not receive their healthcare from you, it's recommended to send a letter/email about your study prior to calling them. This allows them to be introduced to you and your study prior to communicating with you.
4. **Start with Introductions** – As you are a stranger to them, whatever communication style chosen, start with introducing yourself. From the beginning, inform them who you are, what you do, what institution you are affiliated with, why you are able to contact them, and why you are reaching out to them. This helps to minimize any confusion or concerns they potentially may have from being contacted by a stranger.
 - For example, if you are an OHSU team contacting a patient outside your clinic population, "Hi Jane Doe, my name is Dr. Smith, a physician with OHSU, who in collaboration with your healthcare provider from Adventist, is performing a research study about heart health".
5. **Explain What You Do or Don't Have Access To** – As you are not these potential participants healthcare provider, and possibly are affiliated with a non-healthcare institution, it is highly probable they will have questions and concerns about your access to their personal health information. Therefore, it is recommended to address this early on in your communication with them, informing them of what you do and don't have access to, along with how and why this was possible. This can help to minimize any confusion or worry they may have.

- For example, if communicating from an external site with OHSU patients, “Dr. Doe with OHSU, collaborator and co-investigator of this study, obtained a list of people’s names and contact information who may be eligible to participate in this study. The study team from Oregon State University does not have access to people’s individual medical records”.
6. **Create an FAQ** – As mentioned previously, recruiting individuals not from your patient population can be a complicated situation to navigate. There is bound to be questions about the process and study that potential participants, or even your study team, may have. To help address these questions, it’s recommended the study team create an FAQ for internal team use of the top questions and concerns they expect to receive. This document can be continually updated as recruitment progresses and new questions/concerns are identified.
- Examples of frequent questions or concerns teams may receive include:
 - How did you obtain my information and what information have you seen?
 - Why are you allowed to contact me?
 - I want to speak to someone about being contacted about research.

Recommended Communication Content for OHSU Teams Recruiting Outside Patient Population

If you are an OHSU study team looking to recruit patients from outside your patient/clinic population, content recommendations include:

1. As this might be going out to non OHSU patients, recommend to start letter by informing them who the investigator is, their connection to OHSU and, if applicable, any collaborations or approvals this study is being done with from their healthcare organization.
2. In opening paragraph, after introducing investigator, make it clear to patients what this communication is about (i.e. a research study).
3. In second paragraph, state why you are reaching out to them (why you think they are eligible) and what participating in this study entails. It should be clear to them why they are being contacted and what is being asked of them if they choose to participate. You should also include compensation details, if applicable, and any other pertinent information about the study to help them make an informed decision.
4. Depending on your recruitment approach, your last paragraph should state the next step or action item. For example, will you be calling them, should they call you, do they need to click on a link to learn more, or click on a link or button if this was sent through MyChart message. Make it clear to them what happens next and what they should do.
5. Signature block should include name of study, OHSU IRB number, and restate team’s contact information.

Example of Recruitment Letter/Email to Outside Your Patient Population from OHSU Study Team

Subject Line: OHSU Research Opportunity: <Brief tagline re: your study>

Dear <Name>,

Dr. <Name>, a physician at OHSU specializing in <specialty>, is leading a study on <study disease/condition topic>, <if applicable> in collaboration with <provider and/or healthcare organization name(s)>. The goal of this study is to <state purpose of study in plain, 6th grade reading level language that is understandable to the general public>.

You are being contacted because <state why you believe they are eligible (e.g. “were seen in the emergency department in the last month”)>. Participation in this study includes <state a brief summary of what their participation includes, what you are asking of them, including estimated time commitment and location of study visit(s) if applicable>. Participation in this study is voluntary. If you participate in this study, you will receive <compensation details> to compensate you for your time and efforts.

Final paragraph based on recruitment approach:

- <Team to call> We will be calling you to further discuss this study and if you are interested in participating. If you do not want us to call you, or are not interested in participating, you may contact us at <contact information> and we will not contact you further about this study.
- <Patient to call> To learn more about this study or find out if you are eligible, please visit <hyperlink>. For questions, or to speak to the study team, please call <phone number>.
- <MyChart> If you are interested in this study, please click the Clinical Research Opportunity link above to respond to the study team.

Thank you. We appreciate your consideration of our research study.

Sincerely,

<Investigator Name>

<Name of Study>

<OHSU IRB #>

<Contact phone and/or email for study team>

Recommended Communication Content for External Teams Recruiting OHSU Patients

If you are an external study team looking to recruit OHSU patients, content recommendations include:

1. As this is going out to OHSU patients, recommend to start letter by informing them who the investigator is from both sites, thereby highlighting the connection to OHSU.
2. In opening paragraph, after introducing both researchers, make it clear to patients what this communication is about (i.e. a research study).
3. In second paragraph, simply state you are reaching out to them because you believe they may be eligible for your study. Though it is typically recommended that teams specifically call out why potential participants may meet eligibility (e.g. “seen in ED last month”), in this situation, as there may be concerns/confusion that the external site has access to PHI, it is not recommended to do that and to keep it simple.
4. Additionally, in the second paragraph, state what participating in this study entails. It should be clear to them what is being asked of them if they choose to participate. You should also include compensation details, if applicable, and any other pertinent information about the study to help them make an informed decision.
5. Depending on your recruitment approach, your last paragraph should state the next step or action item. For example, will you be calling them, should they call you, or do they need to click on a link to learn more. Make it clear to them what happens next and what they should do.
6. Signature block should include name of study, OHSU IRB number, and restate team’s contact information.
7. If sending email, recommend the email be sent from an OHSU email account rather than from the external site.

Example of Recruitment Letter/Email to OHSU Patient from External Study Team

Subject Line: <External Site> and OHSU Research Opportunity: <Brief tagline re: your study>

Dear <Name>,

Dr. <name> of <external site>, who specializes in <specialty>, and Dr. <name> of OHSU, who specializes in <specialty>, are working together on a study about <study disease/condition topic>. The goal of this study is to <state purpose of study in plain, 6th grade reading level language that is understandable to the general public>.

You are being contacted because we believe you may be eligible for our study. Participation in this study includes <state a brief summary of what their participation includes, what you are asking of them, including estimated time commitment and location of study visit(s) if applicable>. Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate in this study, you will receive <compensation details> to compensate you for your time and efforts.

Final paragraph based on recruitment approach:

- <Team to call> We will be calling you to further discuss this study and if you are interested in participating. If you do not want us to call you, or are not interested in participating, you may contact us at <contact information> and we will not contact you further about this study.
- <Patient to call> To learn more about this study or find out if you are eligible, please visit <hyperlink>. For questions, or to speak to the study team, please call <phone number>.

Thank you. We appreciate your consideration of our research study.

Sincerely,

<Study Title> Study Team

<IRB #>

<Contact phone and/or email for study team>

Resources

OCTRI Recruitment

- Webpage: <https://www.ohsu.edu/octri/find-and-recruit-participants-you-need>
- Email: octrirecruitment@ohsu.edu

OHSU Communications

- Communication Templates: <https://o2.ohsu.edu/communications/templates>
- Email: communications@ohsu.edu

OHSU IRB

- Policy and Forms: <https://www.ohsu.edu/research-integrity/irb-policies-and-forms>
- Email: irb@ohsu.edu

For more information, additional resources, or to request a recruitment consultation, please visit the OCTRI Recruitment [webpage](#) or email octrirecruitment@ohsu.edu.