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Framing Hospital Engagement for the Recruitment of a Birth Cohort for the NCS: Lessons Learned for Ensuring Collaboration in Worcester County

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Context: In 2011, three designated NCS Study Centers began preparatory work for field implementation of a planned recruitment strategy called Provider Based Sampling (PBS). In each PBS primary sampling unit, three hospitals were selected to test the feasibility of recruiting a cohort of 125 women and their babies around delivery time. The selected hospitals for Worcester account for nearly 80% of County births and can be categorized into three distinct facility types and patient catchment areas: an academic medical center; a university-affiliated but independent community hospital; and a private for-profit community hospital with market share competitor of the academic medical center.

Methods: We used tailored negotiations and engagement strategies to gain the cooperation and engagement of targeted hospitals/birthing centers.

Preliminary Conclusions: The lessons learned from this exercise are:

- Time to gain hospital engagement and clearance to initiate study activities ranges anywhere from 2 weeks to 2 months and depends largely upon the type of the institution, the profile of the Negotiator, and the nature of the scope of work.
- A greater likelihood of hospital engagement in the NCS seems to be associated with the depth of existing relationships between the Study Center and targeted hospitals.
- Thoughtful interactions and timely discussions with the key institutional stakeholders (either individually or in groups) are important to achieve collaboration and engagement.
- Balancing sensitivity to clinical cultures and settings while preserving research integrity is essential for study implementation in busy hospital/clinical environments.
- Planning for site compensation and/or the ability to support local clerical staff to help with study activities must be considered as a means to facilitate negotiations and site engagement.
- Adequate resources must be planned for successful implementation and execution of research activities in settings (e.g community hospitals) unfamiliar with research activities.
- Involvement of nursing personnel is crucial for successful implementation of any protocol.

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