Electronic Institutional Review Board (eIRB) System – Benefits and Challenges

INTRODUCTION
The Rowan University is New Jersey’s university of the health sciences and higher education. The Stratford campus, site of Rowan University’s School of Osteopathic Medicine, has its own IRB which has an electronic IRB system.

The primary focus of most electronic IRB system is on the investigator; ensuring an easy application process. It allows researchers to create, modify, and submit their IRB forms and documents electronically. We implemented eIRB at our institution in 2010; with all submissions completed online. There are multiple benefits to using eIRB and also some challenges.

CHALLENGES OF AN EIRB SYSTEM

Information Technology (IT) support
- It is crucial to have IT support in the beginning
- Provide Training / Support via online, in-person and telephone for all users

Reviewers Adapting to IRB Meeting in electronic environment
- Chair or a designated person should lead the agenda on projected screen
- Insist that all members stay with the agenda items projected
- Have IT support during initial few meetings

BENEFITS OF ELECTRONIC IRB (eIRB)

Benefits to Researchers
- Faster turnaround time for investigators, Department Chairs, IRB reviewers and staff; Automatic email notifications which links directly to study workspace.
- Document preparation. eIRB allows the research team to share files and collaborate on the preparation of forms and documents
- All signatures are electronic and can be completed from each person’s computer
- All notifications from the IRB Office (approvals, modifications required, expiration notices, etc.) are communicated electronically within the system
- Document Accessibility. Inbox provides access to studies, stores all study related documents in study workspace. In eIRB, all study related documents are maintained in the study file.
- Status Checks. Everyone can view the status of all study submission whether they are help for signature by department of another investigator.

Benefits to Committee Members
- Ability to view the changes to the protocol activities
- Ability to access the studies anywhere (portability)
- Ability to view other reviewer’s notes before the meeting to have a meaningful discussion on the study

Benefits to the Administrative Staff
- Legibility of the reviewer's comments
- Cost savings with less paper photocopying, mailings, shredding and man power usage

Benefits to Auditors
- Clear audit trail of each study during a review process and after