How to implement more patient-friendly Informed Consent Forms in CAR T-Cell clinical studies: survey results among patients, investigators, and study sponsors.

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Introduction

Patients eligible to participate in a clinical trial must be informed about all significant aspects of the study and freely provide their informed consent to participate. The freely given informed consent as a prerequisite to participate in clinical research serves to protect the human dignity and the right to the integrity of the person as recognized in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union(1). Key regulations governing informed consent forms (ICF) in Europe include the Clinical Trial Regulation (CTR)(2) and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)(3).

However, there has been broad consensus for decades that the ICFs for clinical research are overregulated, resulting in documents that are complex, too long and difficult to understand(4-6).

The large cross-disciplinary coalition of medical societies and patient advocates Reducing Bureaucracy in Clinical Trials (RBinCT) has published recommendations to improve ICFs(7). Unfortunately, these recommendations are rarely implemented in clinical trials involving complex CAR T-cell therapies.

Objective

We conducted specific surveys among patients, physicians, and sponsors of clinical studies involving CAR T-cell therapy to better understand the needs and hurdles for implementing more patient-friendly ICFs in clinical research with these innovative treatments.

Methods

- Specific surveys were conducted among the different stakeholders. Adult patients who received CAR T-cells in a clinical study responded to four specific ICF-related questions in an international cross-sectional online survey developed by the European consortia T2EVOLVE and QUALITOP in collaboration with patients, caregivers and patient organizations(8). The online survey was available from January to October 2023 in seven languages.
- A specific survey for CAR T-cell clinical study sponsors and a separate survey for physicians was disseminated by email and during face-to-face interviews in September-October 2024. Descriptive statistics were used for analyses of the surveys.

Results

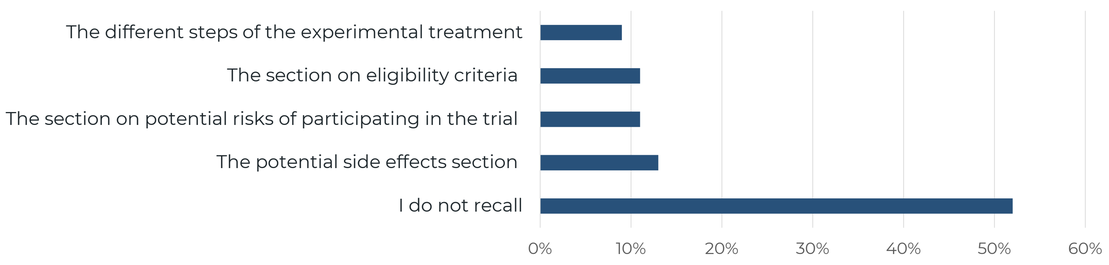
The patient survey (N=392)

A total of 392 patients who were treated with CAR T-cells, completed the T2EVOLVE and QUALITOP online European Survey(8). Of these, 132 patients received their CAR T-cell treatment in a clinical study and responded to the ICF related questions of the online survey.

Table 1: Patient characteristics

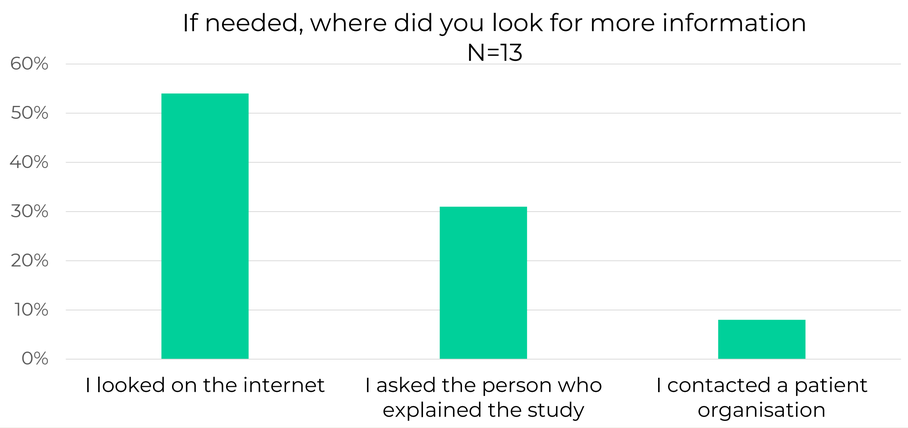
	Patients (N=132)
Age, median (mean; min-max)	65 years (61; 18-85)
>70 years, n (%)	30 (23%)
Female, n (%)	35 (27%)
Time since CAR-T infusion, n (%)	
≤3 months	15 (11%)
4 - 12 months	34 (26%)
13-24 months	33 (25%)
>24 months	50 (38%)

Most difficult section(s) of the consent form was/were the most difficult to understand?
N=132



Ten percent of patients (13/132) mentioned the need for more information.

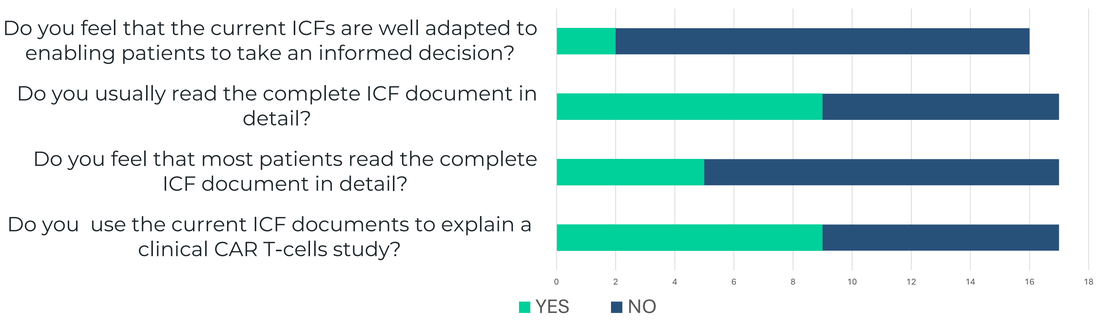
If needed, where did you look for more information
N=13



Results

The physicians survey (N=17)

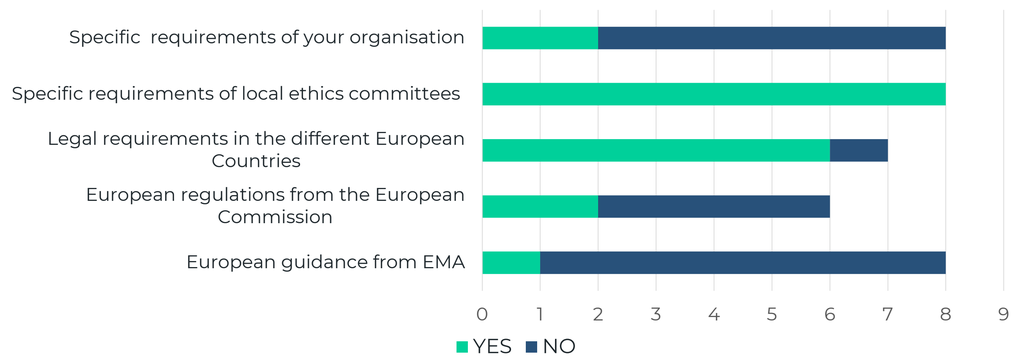
When informing patients about a CAR T-cell study
N=17



The study sponsor survey (N=8)

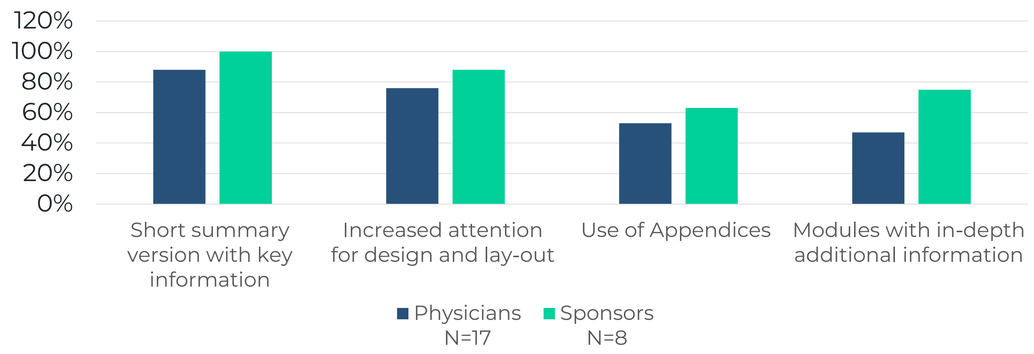
Eight study sponsors replied to the survey: six academic and two industry study sponsors.

What are the current hurdles in Europe to make ICFs more patient friendly
N =8



Potential strategies to make ICFs more patient friendly (Physicians N=17; Sponsors n=8)

Do you agree that one the following strategies would make ICFs more patient friendly?



Conclusions

- Half of the patients could not recall which section of the ICF they found difficult to understand, while for 13%, the potential side effects section was difficult to understand.
- Most physicians believed that the current ICFs are poorly adapted to enabling patients to make an informed decision, and that most patients do not read the complete ICF.
- The specific requirements of national ethics committees and regulators were most frequently mentioned by study sponsors as hurdles to implement more patient-friendly ICFs.
- To address these challenges, joint efforts among all stakeholders; study sponsors, investigators, regulators, ethics committees and patient representatives must continue to implement more patient-friendly ICF forms.
- Future ICF forms should become valuable and comprehensive tools to inform eligible patients, enabling them to make a well-informed and free decision regarding participation in complex CAR T-cell clinical studies.

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