

Staff training goes electronic

In today's global life sciences industry, the importance of regulatory and compliance training is clear. E-learning is proving to be the most effective method.

Government regulators at national, regional and international levels are demanding greater performance and compliance from the life sciences industry. Companies are expected to ensure that all personnel possess up-to-date information and accurate interpretations of the laws applicable to drug development and registration for compliance. For instance, one of the world's largest CROs guarantees that all its employees receive at least 60 hours of regulatory training every year.

As the risks of litigation grow and the frequency of legislation updates that affect industry guidelines continues to increase (primarily in the EU), the need for training also rises. It is estimated that there are nearly 100,000 legal documents worldwide that directly affect the procedures and processes within the life sciences industry, with around 15,000 regulatory updates released every year. The FDA now requires documented evidence of appropriate training.

Adding further strain to an already complex and challenging task, company training budgets are under continual pressure and individuals are often short of time. To solve this problem, corporations should apply innovative e-learning solutions; e-learning allows for support tracking, reporting and certification of compliance training. These solutions provide the information on which, in cases of litigation, a sound legal defence will rely, as well as preventing the costs of compliance from escalating out of control.

Shift in procedures

Traditionally, training has been classroom and paper-based; the use of self-study guides and videotapes has enhanced this training. The problem is that instructor-led training is a cost-inefficient way of training large numbers of people, as there is a limit on the number of individuals who can be successfully trained in a classroom setting. Costs include the instructor, the classroom, travel expenses, possible hotel accommodation and productivity losses due to staff being away from the workplace. It is hard to demonstrate knowledge transfer and retention, and to test competence in a classroom or conference environment. There are also limits to defensible audit trails for classroom or conference training.

Comprehensive web-based e-learning offers an alternative, more effective solution. Well-designed e-learning can increase retention rates and knowledge transfer. For example, reports on case studies from Intel, IBM, Pacific Gas & Electric and Bell South show that good e-learning improves employee job performances by 15–25 per cent over tradition-

al methods and that content retention was up 25–50 per cent compared with classroom training. Because of the instant availability of e-learning, the time it takes for a participant to master content can be significantly reduced. Switching to e-learning can mean productivity losses are minimised together with lost opportunity costs: Accenture Consulting report 70 per cent less time needed for training, at CSX Transportation it took 50 per cent less time to master equivalent content and the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power experienced a 50 per cent reduction in training time.

A complete regulatory e-learning solution can provide a defensible, auditable, centralised environment that tracks compliance

At the end of 2004, one of the top five global pharmaceutical organisations revealed that for every training dollar it spent on e-learning it saved \$9. Just-in-time (JIT) training also minimises time spent waiting for a complete course to be offered in order to get one critical piece of information. Cisco Systems found that the cost of JIT online training was approximately 10 per cent of the cost of classroom training.

A complete regulatory e-learning solution can provide a defensible, auditable, centralised environment that tracks compliance. It can provide the infrastructure to monitor and track performance and document comprehension and completion of the training, and also manage the rapid assimilation of new staff to ensure policies and procedures are implemented across a geographically dispersed and culturally dissimilar workforce. It lowers delivery costs by reducing reliance on third-party classrooms and increases access to learning anytime and anywhere. ■

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