



2026 TRENDS

Clinical Trials

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Legacy Processes Strain Under New Models

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Integrated Roadmaps Replace Siloed Operations

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Supply Chains Gain Strategic Importance

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Vendor Consolidation Reshapes Partnerships

Clinical trials are entering 2026 at a pivotal stage as organizations seek to improve coordination and execution. The year ahead will test how well biotech teams connect operations with data to deliver studies efficiently and consistently. Achieving this balance enables companies to replace reactive risk management with reliable outcomes.

Across the [clinical trials industry](#), the race to reach patients faster continues to accelerate. Early milestones such as protocol development or [CRO selection](#) often create confidence, but progress can stall when operations are treated as a formality. Instead, clinical operations must define how information moves and how partners collaborate for programs to gain direction.

In 2026, focus will turn toward simplifying infrastructure and refining processes that support vendor and supply alignment. Leadership buy-in for IT modernization and data-driven decision making will also become a defining factor, distinguishing companies that rely on measurable insight from those still led by instinct. Clinical operations is becoming the framework that converts scientific objectives into measurable progress for patients.



TREND 1

Legacy Processes Strain Under New Models

Hybrid and decentralized trials are now standard, but many organizations continue to rely on systems designed for traditional site-based studies. [Remote visits and home sampling](#) offer flexibility for participants but expose inefficiencies in procedures built for slower trial formats. [Standard operating procedures \(SOPs\) and monitoring plans](#) must be rewritten to reflect modern oversight that is risk-based and remote.



These challenges appear in three core areas: SOPs, data-driven decision making, and [IT roadmaps](#). Many teams depend on paper-heavy SOPs that cannot adapt to faster timelines. Decision frameworks remain fixed, even though trials now produce continuous operational data that requires active management.

Legacy technology further limits agility. Integrations that rely on nightly uploads are being replaced with event-driven APIs that support [near real-time workflows](#) and reduce manual reconciliation. Despite this, many biotech companies still depend on fragmented CTMS tools or spreadsheets, creating operational blind spots. A clear IT roadmap, one that aligns with trial design and patient engagement strategy, is critical.

Sponsors that don't modernize face risks of [delayed start-up timelines or poor retention](#). As regulators adjust expectations for decentralized studies, process owners must create [compliant workflows](#) that protect [data integrity](#) while supporting patient needs. In 2026, success will depend on recognizing clinical operations as a strategic pillar rather than a procedural step.



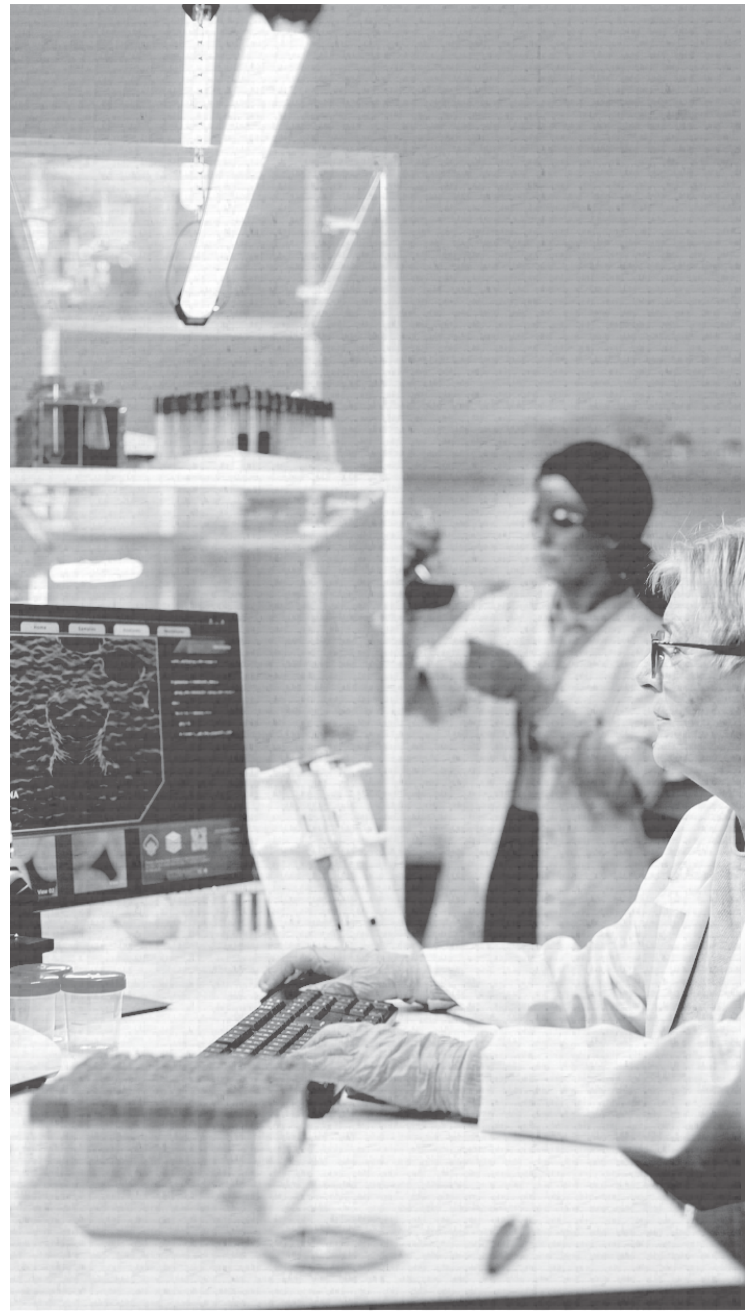
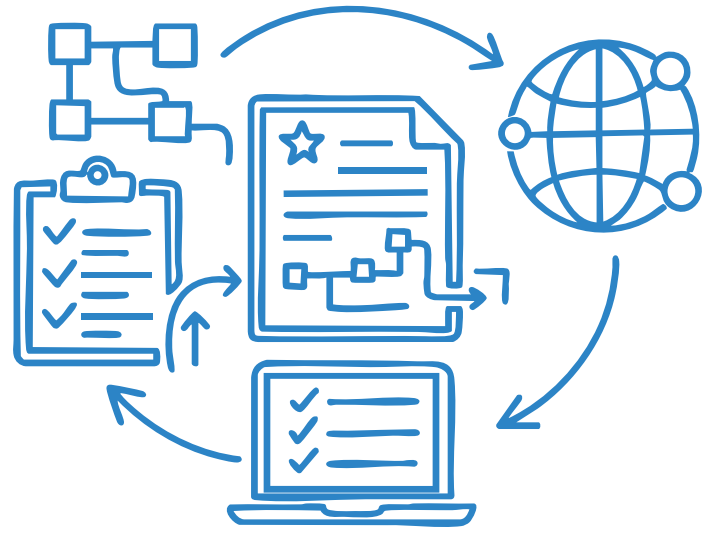
TREND 2

Integrated Roadmaps Replace Siloed Operations

Biotech teams are realizing that isolated functions and disconnected vendor systems can no longer sustain the complexity of modern research. [Adaptive designs](#) require coordination between protocol design and site management. Sponsors now create [unified operational roadmaps](#) before selecting vendors to align trial design with delivery. [Real-time visibility](#) into study progress has become essential for maintaining quality.

[Centralized orchestration platforms](#) are replacing manual handoffs that cause inefficiency across functions. These systems allow clinical and regulatory groups to plan from a shared foundation. Historically, roadmaps concentrated on scientific milestones such as protocol approval or first-in-human studies, while regulatory preparation came later. In 2026, that sequence is changing. Organizations are embedding [regulatory planning and regional sequencing](#) into early operational roadmaps to anticipate approval pathways and market access.

Incorporating [regulatory strategy early](#) helps ensure that decisions on site selection or data standards directly support both execution and future review. This integration reduces late amendments, shortens activation timelines, and builds confidence with investors and patients. Teams using integrated roadmaps report [measurable efficiency gains](#) because dependencies are identified and funded in advance.



TREND 3

Operational Data Becomes the New Currency

Clinical operations leaders are being asked to move beyond tracking activity and start using data to guide decision-making. The focus is shifting from static reports to actionable insight. [Metrics](#) such as site activation time or enrollment rate are now central to planning and resource allocation.



Data fragmentation remains a persistent barrier. Sponsors are investing in [connected systems](#) that bring together operational and supply information to enable proactive planning. [Stronger governance and expanded data literacy](#) ensure that teams act on consistent, validated numbers. [Vendors and CROs](#) are embedding analytics into service delivery, allowing sponsors to access insights as trials progress rather than waiting for completion.

Leadership buy-in determines whether data becomes a trusted guide or a missed opportunity. In biotech companies where leaders rely on intuition, programs often lack the visibility required to act quickly. By contrast, leadership that prioritizes [data as strategy](#) enables faster pivots, greater credibility with stakeholders, and stronger control of budgets and timelines. Performance in 2026 will hinge on how effectively organizations convert real-time information into action backed by leadership support.



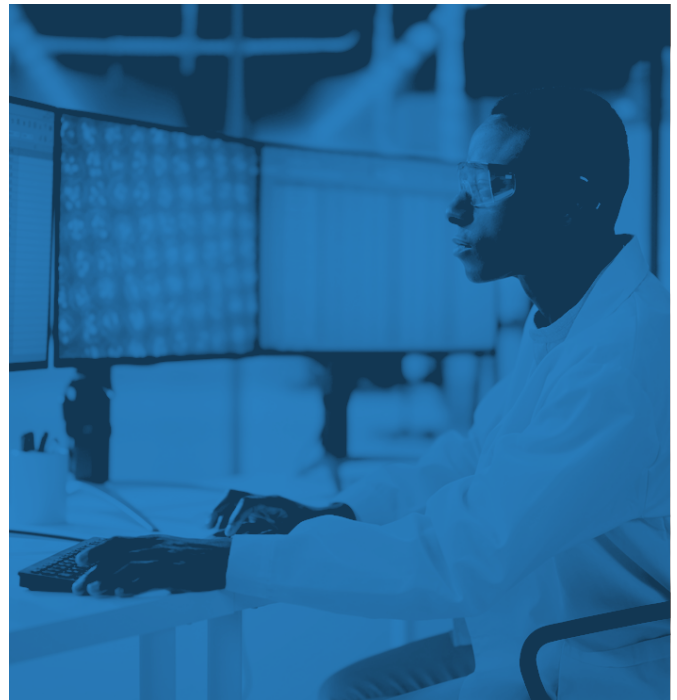
TREND 4

Supply Chains Gain Strategic Importance

The growing complexity of trial logistics is pushing supply management to the forefront of clinical operations. Sponsors are using [predictive forecasting](#) that links enrollment data to patient flow to prevent stock-outs and reduce waste. [Direct-to-patient shipments and regional dispensing hubs](#) are reshaping distribution, requiring supply planning to be part of protocol design instead of an afterthought.

[Real-time tracking](#) gives operations teams visibility into investigational product movement and allows them to resolve issues before dosing schedules are disrupted. These benefits are reflected in the US clinical trials supply and logistics market, which is projected to reach [USD 2.87 billion by 2033, with a CAGR of 8.45%](#). [Supply conditions](#) now influence where studies occur and which cohorts start first based on product stability and shipping time.

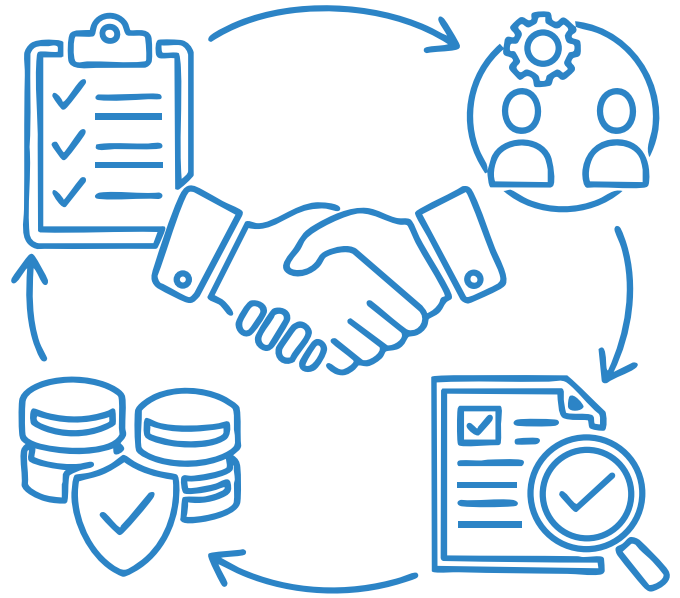
Operations teams are coordinating supply planning with protocol and country strategies to keep investigational products available when needed. Treating supply as a [strategic function](#) improves reliability and regulatory assurance. In 2026, effective supply integration will define how efficiently organizations bring therapies to patients.



TREND 5

Vendor Consolidation Reshapes Partnerships

Organizations are consolidating vendors into strategic partnerships to simplify management and improve accountability. Traditional multi-vendor structures created overlapping systems and unclear ownership. Now, partners are chosen for their ability to support unified workflows and long-term collaboration. A [smaller set of coordinated vendors](#) reduces oversight burden and provides greater transparency across timelines.



[Vendors](#) are becoming strategic collaborators that combine analytics with operational management under one structure. This shift helps sponsors scale efficiently as trials expand. [Contracts](#) are also evolving to emphasize interoperability and [change management](#) so sponsors can transition vendors or transfer data without disrupting study continuity. Consolidation lowers the number of systems that require validation, improving audit readiness and inspection outcomes.

As [outsourcing deepens](#), clarity of responsibility is essential. Sponsors must define who manages supply planning, oversight, and escalation within each partnership. Moving into 2026, vendor consolidation will reflect a broader movement toward unified accountability where sponsors and partners share responsibility for trial success.



Looking Ahead

Clinical trials in 2026 will highlight the growing importance of operational strategy in translating research into patient outcomes. The separation between science and execution is narrowing as organizations recognize that performance in the field determines success in the lab.

Clinical operations now serves as the structural core connecting data systems, vendor relationships, and supply logistics. Leadership buy-in for [technology investment](#) and data-driven planning will be essential to sustain this progress. Biotech teams that modernize processes and integrate regulatory planning early will gain the adaptability needed to manage rising trial complexity.

Moving forward, sponsors must focus on effectively coordinating planning and decision-making across all functions. Those that treat clinical operations as the strategic engine behind science will move therapies to patients with greater speed and consistency. For help getting started, [contact Clarkston's clinical research experts today](#).

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