

Recruitment and Retention

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Three Aspects to Subject Selection

- A. Selection: determining who is eligible
- B. Recruitment: inviting eligible individuals
- C. Retention: retaining enrolled participants

I will focus on recruitment and retention

Need to Recruit and Retain

- To be ethical, clinical trials must collect socially valuable data.
- To collect socially valuable data, clinical trials must have sufficient completers.
- Hence, having sufficient completers is ethically important!

Problematic Trials

- Over 70% of trials are delayed due to problems with enrollment and many never get enough completers.
- These trials raise ethical concerns that risks and burdens to participants are not justified.

Need to Recruit and Retain

- Active recruiting and retention is ethically critical, but overly aggressive recruiting and retention is ethically problematic.
- Need to find the right balance.

Goals

Recruitment and Retention should:

1. Distribute burdens and benefits fairly
2. Ensure social value of research
3. Enhance scientific validity
4. Minimize risks to participants
5. Enhance benefits to participants
6. Protect the vulnerable

SUBJECT RECRUITMENT

Subject recruitment involves active attempts to attract specific individuals within the pool of eligible participants.

Choosing a Site

- Where research is conducted can have a significant impact on who enrolls.
- Low inclusion of racial minorities in some studies likely traces more to study site than widely discussed concerns regarding trust in researchers.

Community vs. Individual Benefit

- Many commentators argue that communities (especially poor or vulnerable ones) should benefit from the clinical trials they host.

 Is it also important for individual (vulnerable) participants to benefit?

Methods of Recruitment

- Inviting one's own patients
- Soliciting referrals from colleagues
- Targeted recruitment
- Advertising

Recruitment for good reasons

- Do not focus recruitment on individuals who are (or appear to be) vulnerable
- Ensure participants are recruited for reasons of science, not compromised (nor privileged) position.

Learning Health Care

- Recruitment is difficult
 - Learning health care systems conduct research in the course of providing care
- ➡ Assuming low net risks, is it acceptable to enroll patients at a clinic or hospital, with or without notification?

Research Cohorts

- Alternatively, some have proposed to invite patients to consent to being entered into a pool of potential participants.
- Those who are eligible for a trial will be enrolled, with or without notification.

Incentives to Enroll participants

- Investigators are under considerable pressure to recruit participants, sometimes receiving financial incentives.

US Inspector General 2000

- Physicians receive payments for referring their patients to trials.

Concerns about Incentives

- Do incentives to recruit and refer patients pose a conflict of interest?
- ➡ To what extent might use of incentives encourage investigators to refer and enroll riskier/inappropriate participants?

Role of Advertising

- Advertising plays an increasingly important role in recruiting research participants.
- However, there is significant concern about the ethics of advertising and not much guidance.

FDA Guidance

- Advertising is “the start of the informed consent and subject selection process.”
- IRBs should determine Ads are: not unduly coercive; do not promise a cure; use appropriate font size and visual effects; explain that test articles are investigational; do not emphasize payment or the amount

What is Good Advertising?

- May benefits be advertised? Must risks?
- Some commentators seem to suggest that good advertising is bad because it is too appealing and bad advertising is bad because it is a waste of resources.

Proposed T.V. Ad

- Thumping music, swirling tie-dye colors:
“Attention alcohol users...you are a candidate for a new research study.
- We are enrolling men and women, 18-40, to study how alcohol affects the brain.

Effect of Ads

- Does advertising affect which groups enroll?
- Does advertising affect understanding?
- Does advertising affect subject motivations (does it matter?)

Confidentiality/Assumptions

- Advertisement about heroin addiction and research.
- Discusses woman who was addicted and through research was able to stop using.
- The Ad included a picture of a smiling woman.

Payment

- What role should payment play in recruiting research participants?
- To what extent is it acceptable to advertise payment?
- What does “do not emphasize” payment mean in practice?

Proposed Bar Coaster

Research Participants Wanted

Earn \$50-\$1295

Call

555-555-5555

Dave's Research Institute

Old Worry #1

- Many commentators worry that emphasizing payment and high payments may undermine participant understanding.
- Empirical studies find that individuals who are focused on payment are more likely to understand the risks of research.

Old Worry #2

- Many commentators worry that payment may be coercive.
- Coercion involves threatening to make an individual worse off (your money or your life)
- Offers of payment are not coercive.

Old Worry #3

- Other commentators worry that payment may represent an undue inducement.
- The fact that an individual enrolls when they would have declined otherwise does not make payment an inducement undue.

Old Worry #3

- Undue inducement involves the possibility that an individual will make a decision that is significantly against their own interests.
- If a study meets all the conditions on ethical research, undue inducement is typically not a concern.

Possible Exception

- Valuable study that poses high net risks to participants.
- Can high payment make it ethical? Is it an undue inducement? Both?

New Worry

- Payments may increase inaccurate reporting of history and side effects.

Dickert. Clin Trials. 2013;10(6):840-841

- Include objective measures in the study?
- Don't disclose eligibility criteria?

Other Challenges

- Data suggest that many problems recruiting participants trace to practical concerns: awareness of studies, transportation, parking, child care.
- Who addresses these concerns?

Difficult to Reach Participants

- Given all the challenges, recruitment efforts may focus on those who are most easy to identify and recruit.
- However, more difficult to recruit individuals may differ in scientifically relevant ways.

Goldman et al. *CI Trials* 2018; 15: 543-550

SUBJECT RETENTION

Subject retention involves attempts to keep participants enrolled for the duration of the study.

Retention of participants

- To collect valid data, recruited participants need to be retained.
- Data suggest that enrolled participants can experience problems in their personal lives as a result of their participation in clinical research.

Lazovski J, et al. *JERHRE* 2009; 4:89-97.

Subjects versus Participants

- How do we turn research subjects into research participants? Do research WITH individuals NOT on them.
- Can we encourage retention while being ethically sensitive to the demands and burdens on participants?

Obligations

- Some argue individuals have an obligation to participate in research.

Schaefer et al JAMA 2009; 302: 67–72

- The hope is that this view will increase enrollment and retention. But others worry it may decrease participation.

Encouragement?

- Research participants make important contributions to research.
- How do we emphasize this fact and encourage retention without undermining voluntariness?

Results from NIH Participants

- Yes: they tell me that I can withdraw.
- But: they never explain why I shouldn't!

Treatment and Treats

How people are treated affects their willingness to contribute to joint activities.

- Explain importance of contribution?
- Add perks, like good meals?
- Throw parties?

Payment Schedules

- Some studies modify their payment schedules to encourage participants to stay in the study: pay more for later procedures; completion bonus.
- These practices raise their own ethical concerns.

Summary

- Recruitment and retention are vital to ethical clinical research.
- The challenges they raise have not received the attention they deserve.
- The 6 goals (and good judgment!) can help to address these ethical challenges.

Further Reading

- Glassman et al. Clinical Trials 2020;17:195-201.
- Grape et al. J Adolesc 2018;65:123-132
- Ewing et al. Dev Cogn Neurosci 2018;32:130-137
- Robinson et al. Trials 2016;17(1):294
- Schoeppe et al. Int J Behav Med 2014;21(5):794-803
- Tobler, Komro, Eval Programm Plan 2011;34(2):87-96
- Zook et al. Clin Trial 2010;7(4):400-410
- Robinson et al. J Clin Epidemiol 2007;60(8):757-765
- Villarruel et al. J Spec Pediatr Nurs 2006;11(4):244-250