



To Your Health

WELCOA'S ONLINE GENERAL WELLNESS BULLETIN



Help Others, Help Yourself?

BE A PARTNER IN CLINICAL RESEARCH

Did you know that you can participate in clinical research? Whether you're healthy or sick, young or old, male or female, you're probably eligible to participate in some type of clinical study. Maybe you or a loved one has an illness, and you'd like to help scientists find a treatment or cure. If you're healthy, you can help researchers learn more about how the body works or how sickness can be prevented.

Clinical research, also known as clinical studies or clinical trials, offers hope for many people, because it helps to find better treatments. Clinical trials are at the heart of all medical advances. And volunteer participants are essential to clinical trials.

Clinical research occurs at places such as hospitals, universities, doctors' offices, and community clinics. Studies may be funded by foundations, medical institutions, pharmaceutical companies, and federal agencies.

People with an illness or disease sometimes join a clinical trial to receive

an experimental treatment or to have the additional medical care and attention offered by clinical trial staff. But many participants also say they volunteer to benefit others. "This will be my chance to give back and help other people, maybe even my family in the future," said one NIH clinical trial volunteer who was battling cancer.

Many HIV-infected volunteers who received experimental AIDS drugs more than 2 decades ago went on to survive and thrive, and treatments given to pregnant mothers kept the virus from passing to their newborns. These antiretroviral drugs have since become standard therapy.

A patient volunteer—someone with a known health problem—can help researchers better understand, diagnose, treat, or cure that disease or condition.

But healthy volunteers, who have no known major health problems, also play an important role in clinical research. They help researchers learn things that may indirectly help themselves and

people they know. Healthy volunteers are usually paid for their efforts.

Both types of volunteers are needed, because researchers can learn more about a disease by comparing patient volunteers to healthy volunteers.

GUIDELINES & CRITERIA

All clinical studies have guidelines about who can participate. Patient volunteers may be selected based on the type and stage of a disease, previous treatment history, and other medical conditions. The selection criteria help to ensure that researchers are studying the right people to help find answers to important medical questions.

Clinical researchers often look for people of different ethnicities, races, ages, and sexes.

Next Page
↓



To Your Health

WELCOA'S ONLINE GENERAL WELLNESS BULLETIN

Continued from previous page

If you're thinking about participating in a clinical trial, members of the research team will talk with you about the details of the study; this is called informed consent. They'll give you a document to sign that includes an overview of the study, such as its purpose, length, procedures, and who to contact for more information.

Members of the research team will also explain the risks and potential benefits of the study. "Volunteers should feel free to ask as many questions as they need to make things clear," says Dr. Christine Grady, an expert in patient protection and bioethics at the NIH Clinical Center. "You can also take the informed consent form home and discuss it with your doctor or somebody else who can help you understand it better."

If you decide to sign the informed consent form, you're still free to withdraw from the study at any time, even after it begins. Informed consent is not a contract; its purpose is to make sure that you know enough about the study to decide whether or not to participate.

Clinical study participants are protected by a group of experts known as an Institutional Review Board (IRB).

"Before the study even starts, clinical research involving humans is almost always reviewed by an IRB," Grady says. "The IRB makes a judgment about whether or not the risks are acceptable and whether the benefits of doing the research justify the risks."

A monitoring team usually also assesses study findings as a clinical trial proceeds. The team stays aware of any potential problems that may arise, and makes sure such issues are addressed.

After a study is completed, clinical researchers carefully examine the information they've collected. The results are often published in scientific journals. If the new approach proves to be safe and effective, it may become standard practice.

There are all kinds of clinical studies. Some evaluate new drugs or new combinations of drugs, new surgical procedures or devices, or new ways to use existing treatments. Others look at certain aspects of care, such as improving the quality of life for people with chronic illnesses.

