

The Importance of Clinical Trials

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Over 90% of children who are eligible to participate in pediatric cancer trials do participate, but in adult settings of clinical trials, less than 5% of eligible patients participate in clinical trials. Why is okay for our children but not okay for us? What is the blockage in terms of participation in clinical trials?

Clinical trials is a process of taking what is unknowable and making it into something discoverable and utilizable to help ourselves go forward. This is what we are looking at today in trying to get people involved in clinical trials, to go from that point of unknowing to knowing. There are various types of clinical trials: prevention, screening, diagnostic, quality of life. All are designed to be able to help the management of disease become more tolerable, more effective, and be able to find cures that can make the disease nonexistent, such as with polio and diphtheria.

Clinical trials are important also because cancer is not a generic thing: tumor size varies, staging varies, the Gleason score is different, the progression is different. As we treat each cancer differently, we must think about how do we decide what future protocols are going to be important and be able to look at not only the broad-scale approach but the narrow-scale approach.

Genetics plays an important part in what kind of drugs we take and what kind of therapies make sense. Many cultures have different stages of disease; Asians present with more liver cancer as opposed to Caucasians while African-Americans have a disproportionately high rate of prostate cancer. Beyond culture and genetics, the environment and access to care are important in terms of determining what will and will not work in a patient, and why participation in a clinical trial is key to solving the disease.

Why should one participate? Those in a clinical trial gets the first benefits of a new therapy. Participants get the best standard of care through continuous monitoring. Ultimately, a clinical trial participant becomes part of preventative medicine and part of protecting the future. Clinical trials are part of the system of change. Nevertheless, clinical trials are not necessarily for everyone. Benefits are balanced against what the risks might be. Communication is needed to assess what we can achieve in both the short term and the long term. When looking at associated costs, some insurances do not pay for clinical trial participation. Regarding privacy, most studies today emphasize protection of privacy.

Ultimately, there is information on the Web which will be utilizable in terms of the drug study, the protocol study, the treatment study of the management of the disease. One must become an informed consumer. Prostate cancer is an epidemic or an endemic; unless changes are made, future generations will face the same things we do today. We must aggressively look to see how we can spread the word in terms of making change happen and really make it happen.