

Myths and Facts About Cancer Clinical Trials

Cancer clinical trials are the link between laboratory discoveries and new cancer therapies. They offer patients access to the best cancer care available, while helping researchers find better ways to prevent and treat the disease.

A clinical trial is a medical research study in which people volunteer to test new methods of prevention, screening, diagnosis, and treatment. Without cancer clinical trials, there would be no treatment advances. Because of the importance of clinical trials in cancer treatment, all patients need to be aware that a cancer clinical trial might be a treatment option. Yet misconceptions persist, keeping many patients from learning more about clinical trials. Here, we debunk some common myths.

Myth: Clinical trials treat patients like ‘guinea pigs’.

Fact: Patients enrolled in a cancer clinical trial receive either the best treatment currently available or a new and possibly more effective therapy. Their health care is closely monitored by leading physicians, and they receive ongoing updates and information as part of the clinical trial process. In addition, the informed consent, which patients read and sign before enrolling, details everything from treatment procedures to potential risks and benefits.

Myth: Clinical trials are a last resort when all other treatments have failed.

Fact: This is a common misconception. In reality, cancer clinical trials exist for all types and stages of cancer, as well as for cancer prevention.

Myth: Clinical trials are too risky.

Fact: There are risks involved, just as there are with any procedure that addresses a life-threatening illness. Your physician can help assess all the factors and determine whether a clinical trial is the best option for you. The statistics on childhood cancers offer a snapshot of the potential of cancer clinical trials. More than 70 percent of children and adolescents with cancer enroll in a clinical trial; more than 80 percent of those survive the disease. These results can be linked directly to the benefits of the clinical trial experience.

Myth: If you enroll in a clinical trial, you may receive a ‘sugar pill’ and get no treatment at all.

Fact: Placebos, or ‘sugar pills,’ are never used in place of treatment when an existing standard therapy is available. When you enroll in a trial, you receive either the best treatment currently known for your cancer, or a new, and possibly more effective, therapy.

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Coalition of
CANCER COOPERATIVE GROUPS



Myth: Clinical trials test unproven treatments.

Fact: New treatments for cancer—in fact, for any disease—go through a long process of evaluation. All treatments first undergo pre-clinical testing in laboratories. This testing, which does not involve patients, helps identify treatments that may not be effective or that could have intolerable side effects. If the treatment passes the pre-clinical testing phase, it moves into clinical trials, and through three or more phases:

- Phase 1: Evaluates safety
- Phase 2: Assesses whether the drug will be effective
- Phase 3: Determines whether the treatment will be better than the current treatments available
- Phase 4: Reviews long-term effects and explores potential new uses for the drug

Myth: It is too confusing, time-consuming, and inconvenient to enroll and participate in a clinical trial.

Fact: Easy-to-use resources make it possible to find cancer clinical trial information in minutes. Patients can then use the information to discuss the trials with their doctor. The Coalition of Cancer Cooperative Groups Web site (www.CancerTrialsHelp.org) offers TrialCheck®, an online search tool providing

clinical trial information according to type of cancer and zip code, so that patients can locate trials being conducted at medical centers, hospitals, and/or community cancer centers close to home. The Coalition's Call Center (1-877-227-8451) connects visitors directly to the American Cancer Society's National Cancer Information Center, where specialists—using TrialCheck®—support patients in pursuing the clinical trial option with their doctors.

Myth: Health insurance will not cover the costs of a clinical trial.

Fact: Many insurers cover the normal costs of treatment in cancer clinical trials, and many states have mandatory coverage. Check with your doctor or insurance plan to see if you are covered. Medicare has been covering these costs since June 2000. For up-to-date information on Medicare and cancer clinical trials, visit the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services at www.medicare.gov.

About the Coalition of Cancer Cooperative Groups

The Coalition of Cancer Cooperative Groups (www.CancerTrialsHelp.org) is a nonprofit charitable organization whose mission is to improve the quality of life and survival of cancer patients by increasing participation in cancer clinical trials.

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