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Childhood Cancer - About Clinical Trials [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [2], 03/2014

ON THIS PAGE: You will learn more about clinical trials, which are the main way that new medical approaches are tested to see how well they work. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

Doctors and scientists are always looking for better ways to treat children with cancer. To make scientific advances, doctors develop research studies involving volunteers, called clinical trials.

Many clinical trials are focused on new treatments, evaluating whether a new treatment is safe, effective, and possibly better than the current or standard treatment. These types of studies evaluate new drugs, different combinations of existing treatments, new approaches to radiation therapy or surgery, and new methods of treatment.

Children who participate in clinical trials are often among the first to receive new treatments before they are widely available. However, there is no guarantee that the new treatment will be safe, effective, or better than a standard treatment.

There are also clinical trials that study new ways to ease symptoms and side effects during treatment and managing the late effects that may occur after treatment. Talk with your child?s doctor about clinical trials regarding side effects.

Parents and children decide to participate in clinical trials for many reasons. For some children, a clinical trial is the best treatment option available. Because standard treatments are not perfect, parents and children are often willing to face the added uncertainty of a clinical trial in the hope of a better result. Other parents/children volunteer for clinical trials because they know that these studies are the only way to make progress in treating childhood cancer. Even if they do not benefit directly from the clinical trial, their participation may benefit future children with cancer.

Sometimes people have concerns that, by participating in a clinical trial, they may receive no treatment by being given a placebo or ?sugar pill.? The use of placebos in cancer clinical trials is rare. When a placebo is used in a study, it is done with the full knowledge of the participants. Find out more about placebos in cancer clinical trials [3].

To join a clinical trial, parents and children must participate in a process known as informed consent. During informed consent, the doctor should list all of the patient?s options so that the

person understands how the new treatment differs from the standard treatment. The doctor must also list all of the risks of the new treatment, which may or may not be different from the risks of standard treatment. Finally, the doctor must explain what will be required of each parent/child in order to participate in the clinical trial, including the number of doctor visits, tests, and the schedule of treatment.

For specific topics being studied for childhood cancer, learn more in the Latest Research [4] section or in the individual cancer type [5] section.

Patients who participate in a clinical trial may stop participating at any time for any personal or medical reason. This may include that the new treatment is not working or there are serious side effects. Clinical trials are also closely monitored by experts who watch for any problems with each study. It is important that parents of patients participating in a clinical trial talk with their child?s doctor and researchers about who will be providing their treatment and care during the clinical trial, after the clinical trial ends, and/or if the patient chooses to leave the clinical trial before it ends.

Cancer.Net offers a lot of information about cancer clinical trials in other areas of the website, including a complete section on clinical trials [6] and places to search for clinical trials for a specific type of cancer [7].

The next section helps explain the areas of research going on today about this type of cancer. Use the menu on the side of your screen to select Latest Research, or you can select another section, to continue reading this guide.

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/childhood-cancer/about-clinical-trials
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/24390
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/18698
[5] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types
[6] http://www.cancer.net/node/24863
[7] http://www.cancer.net/node/24878