

## CONTINUING EDUCATION

# A Nurse's Primer on Recruiting Participants for Clinical Trials

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**Purpose/Objectives:** To identify common barriers to the recruitment of participants for oncology clinical trials, identify strategies that would be useful in increasing enrollment of participants in oncology clinical trials, and describe the role of the clinical trial nurse in the recruitment process.

**Data Sources:** Published articles and abstracts, empirical studies, conference proceedings, references from bibliographies of pertinent articles and books, and computerized databases from 1994–2001.

**Data Synthesis:** The barriers to participant recruitment in clinical trials may be categorized as being related to either the patient, healthcare provider, or protocol.

**Conclusions:** Several achievable strategies for improving recruitment to oncology clinical trials exist. Nurses need to understand the complex and diverse factors that influence participant accrual to oncology clinical trials. Strategies to increase enrollment should focus on increased communications and education for patients and healthcare providers. Dedicated clinical trials nurses can play an integral part in the recruitment and accrual of patients to oncology clinical trials.

**Implications for Nursing:** Clinical trial nurses play many important roles in the conduct of oncology clinical trials. To better plan and manage these investigations, nurses need to develop strategies to mitigate the complex and diverse factors that may influence accrual patterns.

Clinical trials of new cancer therapies are a necessary step in the process of translating scientific discovery and technical advancement into procedures and products that offer the prospect of a better life (Koski, 2000). In a recent survey conducted by Harris Interactive (2001), members of the public reported a strong willingness to participate in clinical trials if they ever were diagnosed with cancer. Yet, in the United States today, only 2%–4% of all adult patients newly diagnosed with cancer participate in National Cancer Institute (NCI) clinical trials annually (Lara et al., 2001). This shortage in the number of patients for clinical trials often results in a prolonged trial duration, early closure because of lack of participants, compromised generalizability of the trial's findings, increased cost of studies, and delays in the development and adoption of new treatments.

### Key Points . . .

- Barriers to participant recruitment in clinical trials may be categorized as being related to either the patient, healthcare provider, or protocol.
- Strategies to increase enrollment focus on increased communication and education for patients and healthcare providers.
- A dedicated clinical trial nurse can be of paramount importance to successful recruiting for clinical trials.

### Goal for CE Enrollees:

To enhance nurses' knowledge about recruiting patients for clinical trials.

### Objectives for CE Enrollees:

1. Identify common barriers to the recruitment of participants for oncology clinical trials.
2. Identify strategies that would be useful in increasing enrollment of participants in oncology clinical trials.
3. Describe the role of the clinical trial nurse in the recruitment process.

### Significance to Oncology Nursing

Oncology research nurses have many roles in the conduct of cancer clinical trials (Aiken, 2000; Joshi & Ehrenberger, 2001; Ocker & Plank, 2000; Sadler, Lantz, Fullerton, & Dault, 1999). One of the most important roles is assisting with the process of recruitment and accrual of participants. To better plan and manage clinical trials, nurses must gain a better

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