

CONSUMER GUIDE TO PEDIATRIC CLINICAL TRIALS

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said “The children of today will make the India of tomorrow. The way we bring them up will determine the future of the country.”¹

Paediatric drug research is gradually becoming more and more accepted as the norm for assessing whether a drug is safe and efficacious for infants and children. Childhood is universal transcend for all nationalities and it has no artificial boundaries.

While right to health is regarded as part of human rights and applicable to all, children constitute the most neglected segment having been denied adequate realization of right to health. One of the reasons behind the negligence towards child health is the lack of their control over adverse health events, sanitation and environment. They are totally dependent upon adults for their needs. The betterment of children is firmly rooted in the social, political, economic, cultural and environmental determinants of health. Under the legal framework, in case of lack of adequate parental care, the State must be responsible to provide medical care by making child-centric policies and sufficient allocation of funds. Moreover, family as the fundamental group of society plays a substantial role in nurturing children and it shall provide the required environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly to the children. Thus, children should get necessary pre-conditions and assistance for the harmonious development of their personality.²

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¹ Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, (Nehru, 1946)

(Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, 1946)

² Bhupinder Singh, *Child Health Law* (Satyam Law International, New Delhi, 2016) at p. 35.

The Constitution of India, which came into force in January 1950, contains provisions for survival, development and protection of children. These are included both in Part III and Part IV of the Constitution pertaining to 'Fundamental Rights' and 'Directive Principles of State Policy'.

Similar to the international law, in India, all the Constitutional provisions, legislations and Government policies and schemes related to right to health have direct impact upon the health right of the child. Whereas the right to health can be regarded as part of human rights and applicable to all, children constitute the most neglected segment having been denied adequate health care.

2. CLINICAL TRIAL:

“Clinical trials can show researchers what does and doesn’t work in humans that cannot be learned in the laboratory or in animals.”³

New drugs are studied in several stages, which begin with animals and end with humans. One of the reasons for using animals is that the animal systems are so similar to human systems, that by studying the effect of drugs on animals we may predict the effect on humans. We share almost 95-98% of our DNA with mice or rats, and most human effects are predictable from animal studies. However, certain effects cannot be predicted from animal studies. Additionally, though there is a general agreement between animal and human effects of drugs, the effects are not identical, no government or organization is likely to accept animal data as sole evidence before releasing the drug for clinical use. A new drug cannot be available for clinical use without a clinical trial. Clinical trials are a must for the development of new drugs. Mostly, clinical trials are performed using patient participants except for Phase-I trials where usually, though not always, healthy volunteers participate. Thus, in most clinical trials, there is a chance of benefit to the participant,

³ Why are clinical Trials important available at https://oley.org/page/clinical_trials last seen on 19/09/2023

while in Phase I trials, the benefit is unlikely. Volunteers for Phase I trials may do so, due to the monetary rewards or true altruistic feelings. Clinical trials are well-thought-out, controlled studies where the safety and efficacy of a new drug or therapy are tested to develop treatments for helping people affected with diseases. Literature suggests that human research started as early as 6th century B.C. when meat and vegetable experiments were done on young men, as stated in the Old Testament of the Bible. Clinical trials have maintained some of the characteristics throughout, but have evolved and matured over time.

3. MEANING OF CLINICAL TRIAL:

Clinical Trial or Clinical Research is medical research involving people. Clinical trials are investigations conducted in medicine with the goal of improving the treatment of a specific illness. A clinical trial's objective is to assess novel treatments in order to discover how well they work and any potential negative effects. Clinical trials are one of several choices for treating a disease or illness, and they are regarded as a component of best practice medicine.

There are two types, observational studies and clinical trials.⁴Observational studies observe people in normal settings. Researchers gather information, group volunteers according to broad characteristics, and compare changes over time. For example, researchers may collect data through medical exams, tests, or questionnaires about a group of older adults over time to learn more about the effects of different lifestyles on cognitive health. These studies may help identify new possibilities for clinical trials.

Clinical trials are a type of research that studies new tests and treatments and evaluates their effects on human health outcomes. People volunteer to take part in clinical trials to test medical interventions including drugs, cells and other biological products, surgical procedures, radiological

⁴(Chiranjib.B)

procedures, devices, behavioural treatments and preventive care. Clinical trials are carefully designed, reviewed and completed, and need to be approved before they can start. People of all ages can take part in clinical trials, *including children*.

4. PEDIATRIC CLINICAL TRIALS:

Children are subject to many of the same diseases as adults, and are often treated with the same drugs and biological products. However, many drugs on the market used to treat children are inadequately labelled for use with paediatric patients; and many carry disclaimers stating that safety and effectiveness in paediatric patients have not been established. Information about the safety and effectiveness of treatments for some paediatric age groups is particularly difficult to find. Even today, no treatment is available for many of the thousands of rare and serious diseases that largely affect neonates, infants and children. Most drugs used to treat common diseases in both children and adults have not been investigated in children at all. Over 50% of all drugs prescribed in paediatric practice are either 'unlicensed' or 'off label'.⁵ As a result of effectively being denied access to well-studied drugs, paediatricians either don't treat children with potentially beneficial medications, or treat them with medications based either on adult studies or anecdotal empirical experience in children. Such non-validated administration of medications may place more children at risk than if the drugs were administered as part of well-designed, controlled clinical trials. There is therefore a moral imperative to formally study drugs in children, so they can enjoy equal access to existing as well as new therapeutic agents.⁶

⁵ David Machin, Simon Day "*Text Book Of Clinical Trial*" (David Machin 2004)

⁶ Sylvon Green "*Clinical Trial in Pediatrics*" (*Text Book Of Clinical Trial 2004*)

5. WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

A clinical trial is intended for a certain population, and participation is subject to stringent restrictions. The inclusion criteria that permit a paediatric to take part in the trial are often outlined in these guidelines. These could include things like age, gender, the kind and stage of the illness, prior medical history, and other ailments. The guidelines also frequently list the exclusion criteria. These are the things that would keep someone from taking part. The purpose of the inclusion and exclusion criteria is to guarantee that every participant in the paediatric clinical trial has the same qualities in order for the study to provide trustworthy results for use in future medical practice or to get a novel treatment approved by health authorities.

Many different types of people take part in clinical trials. Some studies include healthy volunteers, while other studies include patient volunteers. Some studies include both healthy and patient volunteers. The paediatric clinical trial will determine the amount of time required, potential discomfort, and associated risks. While some studies just need a small bit of time and effort, others might need a significant time and effort commitment as well as some discomfort. There may be some risk associated with the paediatric clinical trial. A thorough explanation of the tasks you will be required to complete for the study as well as any potential dangers is part of the informed consent procedure for volunteers.⁷

6. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN CLINICAL TRIALS?

The Participating in research is voluntary for clinical trials but in case of paediatric clinical trial the guardians willingness to convince there child is to be considered. It is important that no one feel forced to take part in a trial. Participating in a paediatric clinical trial could result in benefits for consumers.⁸

⁷ Who can participate in clinical trials available at <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/research/clinical-trials-participating> last seen on 15/03/2024.

⁸ Consumer guide for clinical trials available at https://www.australianclinicaltrials.gov.au/sites/37/default/files/2023-10/consumer-guide-to-clinical-trials_0.pdf last seen on 16/3/2024.

- a. Clinical trials enable consumers to access the newest, most up-to-date research treatments, before they are available to the general public. Participating in a clinical trial may also allow consumers to gain advice and treatment from leading medical experts in cutting edge medical facilities and provide them with greater understanding of their condition or illness.
- b. Participating in a clinical trial also allows a consumer to play an active role in their healthcare and their treatment.
- c. Clinical trials may be important for child with rare or difficult to treat conditions for which there may be limited evidence about how the condition is best treated or managed.
- d. Child participating in clinical trials may be monitored more closely and comprehensively compared with those receiving standard treatment.
- e. Other consumers may benefit in the future through the lessons learned, both good and bad, during the clinical trial.⁹

7. INFORMED CONSENT:

Before any child is enrolled in a study, it's important that parent or guardian and the child understand risks and benefits of participating. Because the child is a minor, and parent or guardian may be legally required to give informed consent allowing them to participate. The child may also need to give their assent after having the trial explained to them in an age-appropriate manner. Both parent or guardian and the child should have the chance to ask any questions they want before they agree to participate, and also at any time during the study.¹⁰

⁹Consumer guide for clinical trials available at https://www.australianclinicaltrials.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-10/consumer-guide-to-clinical-trials_0.pdf last seen on 16/3/2024

¹⁰ Clinical Trials in Children available at <https://www.who.int/clinical-trials-registry-platform/clinical-trials-in-children> last seen on 16/3/2024

The Informed Consent is explained in New Drugs And Clinical Trials Rule 2019 is as follows Informed Consent. (a) In all trials, a freely given, informed, written consent is required to be obtained from each study subject. The Investigator must provide information about the study verbally as well as using a patient information sheet, in a language that is nontechnical and understandable by the study subject. (b) The subject's consent must be obtained in writing using an "Informed Consent Form". Both the patient information sheet as well as the informed consent form should have been approved by the ethics committee and furnished to the Central Licencing Authority. Any changes in the informed consent documents should be approved by the ethics committee and submitted to the Central Licencing Authority before such changes are implemented. (c) Where a subject is not able to give informed consent (e.g. an unconscious person or a minor or those suffering from severe mental illness or disability), the same may be obtained from a legally acceptable representative a legally acceptable representative is a person who is able to give consent for or authorise and intervention in the patient as provided by the law of India). (d) If the trial subject his or her legally acceptable representative is unable to read or write an impartial witness should be present during the entire informed consent process who must append his or her signature to the consent form.

(e) In case of clinical trials on paediatrics, the subjects are legally unable to provide written informed consent, and are dependent on their parent or legal guardian to assume responsibility for their participation in clinical studies.

In such case,-

(i) Written informed consent should be obtained from the parent or legal guardian. However, all paediatric participants should be informed to the fullest extent possible about the study in a language and in terms that they are able to understand.

(ii) Where appropriate, paediatric participants should additionally assent to enrol in the study. Mature minors and adolescents should personally sign and date a separately designed written assent form.

(iii) Although a participant's wish to withdraw from a study must be respected, there may be circumstances in therapeutic studies for serious or life-threatening diseases in which, in the opinion of the Investigator and parent or legal guardian, the welfare of a paediatric patient would be jeopardized by his or her failing to participate in the study.

In this situation, continued parental or legal guardian consent should be sufficient to allow participation in the study. (f) A checklist of essential elements to be included in the study subject's informed consent document as well as a format for the informed consent form for trial subject is given in Table 3 of this Schedule. (g) An audio-video recording of the informed consent process in case of vulnerable subjects in clinical trials of New Chemical Entity or New Molecular Entity including procedure of providing information to the subject and his understanding on such consent, shall be maintained by the investigator for record: Provided that in case of clinical trial of anti-HIV and anti-leprosy drugs, only audio recording of the informed consent process of individual subject including the procedure of providing information to the subject and his understanding on such consent shall be maintained by the investigator for record.¹¹

8. CONCLUSION:

To conduct trials on children, all parties involved—investigators, sponsors, and regulators—should have received the necessary training. In the best interests of this unique group, strengthening the laws that will make sure all the rules are followed would be the most difficult and successful course of action.

¹¹ https://cdsco.gov.in/opencms/export/sites/CDSCO_WEB/Pdf-documents/NewDrugs_CTRules_2019.pdf last seen on 16/3/2024.

Because children differ physiologically from adults, it is imperative to conduct clinical trials in order to ensure that improved medicines become available to them. In order to promote better medications for children, regulatory bodies in the US and Europe have made progress in this area. The nation has passed pediatric laws to support the development of drugs for children, and pharmaceutical companies must comply with unique rules and obligations in order to be eligible for incentives. Pediatric clinical trials are currently not subject to a separate regulatory framework in India; nonetheless, schedule Y contains some guidelines. For the safety of children, the Indian health authorities must also create separate laws for clinical trials.

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