



JOHNS HOPKINS
BLOOMBERG
SCHOOL of PUBLIC HEALTH

Department of Epidemiology
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
415 N. Washington Street, 2nd Floor
Baltimore, Maryland 21231

20 November 2019

Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: On what I learned from 60 years of trials

I wrote previously on this topic (9 May 2018) in which I detailed my trials record. I soon realized trials are not for the faint of heart and came to appreciate what Donald Fredrickson (Director of the NIH: 1 July 1975 to 30 June 1981), meant in an address before the New York Academy of Science in 1968 when he said *they lack glamor, they strain our resources and patience, and they protract the moment of truth to excruciating limits.*

Things learned

It is hard to pick a winner
It can take as long to get funded as it takes to do a trial
Matching placebos are hard to come by
Masking is difficult and overrated
Randomization does not ensure balance in the treatment groups
When something looks fishy, it usually is
Too many pigs under the same blanket and they all get away
It takes a village to write a paper in trials
When you get results the world does not want to hear, you are the problem
Trials are great learning experiences
Protocols change
You never know when the end comes via early stops so keep your powder dry
You will not succeed absent a partnership with the funding agency
There is no substitute for site visits and investigator meetings
Check, check, and check some more
When 2+2 does not equal 4 you are missing something
Counting is hard
The only endpoint in trials is death
All trials involve select nonrepresentative populations
Consents are not contracts