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Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: The best of times, the worst of times

My apologies to Charles Dickens for borrowing from his famous opening to *Tail of Two Cities*. His story is set in London and Paris before and during the French Revolution. Mine is about trials in a pandemic.

“The best of times” because never before has there been more interest in trials, even from the President. Everybody wants to know when there will be a vaccine to protect us from CoViD-19 with estimates all over the map, indeed if one can be developed at all.

The worst of times because of the chaos caused by the pandemic impacting trials.

I was born on the night of the long knives, the dawning of WW II. The first day of a three day purge ordered by Hitler, carried out by his SS (Schutzstaffel), resulting in the murder of Ernst Röhm, head of the “Brown Shirts” (Sturmabteilung), and several others.

By an accident of birth, when I came of age professionally years later, I would be entering the field of trials at the beginning of its heyday as they emerged from relative obscurity to places of prominence over the next 50 years.

But now, that I do not buy green bananas anymore, I am aware that trials as I knew them are relics, forever changed by the pandemic we are living in.

To be sure, trials will remain, but how we do them will change. We will reckon time before or after the pandemic.

“Social distancing” is foreign to people having evolved over millenniums living in herds.

Before “social distancing”, when I sat on my deck people waved as they walked by. Now it is as if they are afraid of getting covid-19 if they wave.

It is hard to envision throngs of people at baseball or football games until long after the need for “social distancing” has passed. Even if hand shakes come back, trialists will have long since transited to virtual contacts partly out of need and because it “saves” time. Virtual contacts with study participants and investigators will change how we think about and do trials.

I grew up in trials exhorting the virtues of face-to-face investigator meetings. The next generation of trialists will probably never meet fellow investigators face-to-face. Too bad.