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Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: Odds of finishing a trial

The answer depends on what “finishing” means.

Trials are not like sporting events with established rules. Designs can change during a trial. For example, the University Group Diabetes Program, as originally designed had four treatment groups and seven study centers. Ultimately the design was expanded to include another study treatment group and a matching placebo treated group and expanded to include twelve study centers.

Trials are more like baseball games that in theory can go forever. (The longest professional game was June 23, 1981, between the Pawtucket Red Sox and the Rochester Red Wings, of the Triple-A International League. It lasted 33 innings.)

Finish is an elusive term in trials. The design can be changed so “finish” when the trial started may be different after modification. A crude indicator of odds of finishing are in numbers of trials suspended, terminated, withdrawn, or status unknown. By that measure your odds of finishing are somewhere between 73 and 85%.

Table 1: Trials suspended, terminated, withdrawn, or unknown status

Yr started	No. started	No. not finished (suspended, terminated, withdrawn, unknown status)*	% not finished
2000	1,872	281	15.01%
2005	7,727	1,428	18.48%
2010	13,410	3,237	24.14%
2015	18,820	5,179	27.52%
2020	22,496	4,731	21.03%

* Suspended: The study has stopped early but may start again.

Terminated: The study has stopped early and will not start again. Participants are no longer being examined or treated.

Withdrawn: The study stopped early, before enrolling its first participant.

Unknown: A study on ClinicalTrials.gov whose last known status was recruiting; not yet recruiting; or active, not recruiting but that has passed its completion date, and the status has not been last verified within the past 2 years.

An operational definition of “finish” is when results are posted per the 2007 FDA ruling requiring investigators to post results within one year of completion of a trial. The counts below are for results posted on or after the year of completion.

Table 2: Trials completed with results posted

Yr completed	No. completed	Posted results	% posted
2008	8,722	3,218	37%
2010	10,946	3,516	32%
2015	16,381	3,895	24%
2020	21,598	2,922	14%