



(Wed) 26 June 2013

Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: Registration of meta-analyses and systematic reviews of trials?

Registration of trials came about in 2004 when the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) indicated that *ICMJE member journals will require, as a condition of consideration for publication, registration in a public trials registry.*

The requirement was driven by concerns regarding selective reporting (publication bias): *The case against selective reporting is particularly compelling for research that tests interventions that could enter mainstream clinical practice. Rather than a single trial, it is usually a body of evidence, consisting of many studies, that changes medical practice. When research sponsors or investigators conceal the presence of selected trials, these studies cannot influence the thinking of patients, clinicians, other researchers, and experts who write practice guidelines or decide on insurance-coverage policy. If all trials are registered in a public repository at their inception, every trial's existence is part of the public record, and the many stakeholders in clinical research can explore the full range of clinical evidence.* (DeAngelis et al; JAMA 2004; 292:1,363-1,364)

How registration protects against selective reporting remains a mystery, but if registration is a good idea the requirement should extend to meta-analyses and systematic reviews of trials. If it is important to be able to identify trials never published it is certainly every bit as important to be able to do the same for meta-analyses and systematic reviews undertaken but never published.

The ICMJE were moved to act by the urging of people interested in the product of trials for use in meta-analyses and systematic reviews, but what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Registration sites like ClinicalTrials.gov should be expanded to include registration of meta-analyses/systematic reviews. The ICMJE should require registration prior to the start of data harvests for meta-analyses and systematic reviews as a condition for publication.