



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

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Memorandum

To: Trialists
 Fr: Curtis Meinert
 Re: Arm versus group

You are in a Zoom meeting of trialists, all foreign to you.

Your task: Identify the “cancer types” in the gathering.

I know if I hear someone referring to soda as pop, odds are the person is from the Midwest. Likewise, if I hear someone talking about treatment arms, odds are the person is a “cancer type”. To “prove” the practice we searched abstracts of 2016 publications indexed to the publication type [clinical trial] and then searched abstracts for use of “treatment arm” or “treatment group”.

Journal	Publs indexed to [clinical trial]	“treatment arm” in abstract	“treatment group” in abstract
J Clin Oncology	170	18	3
NEJM	138	0	27
JAMA	67	0	18

Reference to a physical feature as a synonym for group is unfortunate if only because of the implied imagery to a trial involving two treatment groups (or six if the imagery is to an octopus).

The vocabulary of CT.gov is “arm”: *A group or subgroup of participants in a clinical trial that receives a specific intervention/treatment, or no intervention, according to the trial's protocol.*

Types of arms, as defined under “arm type” in the glossary include “*experimental arm, active comparator arm, placebo comparator arm, sham comparator arm, and no intervention arm*”.

The only entry for “group” in the glossary is: “*A subgroup of participants in an observational study that is assessed for biomedical or health outcomes*”.