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5 July 2017

## Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: Contrived names for trials

We live in a world of acronyms. Snafu, sep, pita, BTW, and LOL and my personal grading system: WTS, POS, and BTS.

Some business names have been replaced by their acronyms; IBM instead of International Business Machines; ADT instead of American District Telegraph.

I do most of my TV viewing with the sound off. In sporting events I do not need someone telling me what I just saw. With cable networks, with everybody talking at the same time, I rely on the crawlers at the bottom of the screen but you have to know the lingo. FLOTUS, SCOTUS, and POTUS for starters.

Acronyms like NATO, radar, and laser are words formed from the initial letters of a term.

Examples of trials with names forming acronyms include:  
ADAPT: Alzheimer's Diseases Anti-inflammatory Prevention Trial  
AREDS: Age-related Macular Degeneration Study  
CAMP: Childhood Asthma Management Program  
CDP: Coronary Drug Project  
NETT: National Emphysema Treatment Trial  
UGDP: University Group Diabetes Program

I am involved in a trial with a name that sounds like a name for a movie and passes for an acronym but is not an acronym.

## STURDY

I can never remember what it stands for.

### Study To Understand Fall Reduction And Vitamin D In You

I was not around when the name was chosen, but chances are that somebody came up with the name and then gerrymandered the letters to come up with the name.

If I had been around I would have argued for  
Fall Reduction Vitamin D Trial (FRVDT)

or

Fall Reduction D Vitamin Trial (FRDVT)

My name would have been shorter (5 versus 10 words), would have had fewer characters (27 versus 46), and would have had "trial" as the base term rather than "study", but I expect I would have

lost to STURDY because STURDY is pronounceable and has more appeal than FRVDT or FRDVT.

So what is the naming behavior of trialists?

For insight I turn to 2016 publications indexed to the publication type [randomized controlled trial] and appearing in the BMJ, JAMA, Lancet, and NEJM. Out of the 307 publications, half (152 publications) had masthead listings that included the corporate name of the investigator group responsible for the trial. For example as with:

### **Ocrelizumab versus Placebo in Primary Progressive Multiple Sclerosis**

X. Montalban, S.L. Hauser, L. Kappos, D.L. Arnold, A. Bar-Or, G. Comi, J. de Seze, G. Giovannoni, H.P. Hartung, B. Hemmer, F. Lublin, K.W. Rammohan, K. Selmaj, A. Traboulsee, A. Sauter, D. Masterman, P. Fontoura, S. Belachew, H. Garren, N. Mairon, P. Chin, and J.S. Wolinsky, for the ORATORIO Clinical Investigators

Of those, only 15 had the name spelled out in the masthead. The remainder gave only the study acronym or nickname. Of the remainder, only 83 had the name in the body of the manuscript leaving us to puzzle what names like

SMOOTH (JAMA)  
FIRE and ICE (NEJM)  
UNCOVER (NEJM)

and

TOUCHSTONE (NEJM)

stand for.

Even when the actual name is given in the body of the manuscript, one is often left guessing as to how the masthead listing relates to the actual study name.

For example, there is an NEJM publication with a masthead attribution to “I-SPY 2 investigators”. The results described are from an *Investigation of serial studies to predict your therapeutic response through imaging and molecular analysis 2*. The only thing in common with the two names is the numeral 2.

I wish investigators would choose names that make sense, that the full name would be used in consent and study documents, and that editors would require that the full name be spelled in the masthead or body of manuscripts.

The name should:

1. Have “trial” as a base (not “study”, “project”, “program”, or “interventional study”),
2. Be comprised of eight or fewer words,
3. Be free of unnecessary or redundant terms,
4. Convey information as to the nature of the treatments being tested,
5. Convey information as to the condition or disease being treated,
6. Not be contrived to produce a pronounceable acronym or “cute” nickname,

and

7. Be spelled out in consent documents and author masthead listings.

The acronym should:

1. Be formed from the first letter of each word in the name,
2. Be specified when the name is chosen,
3. Be of eight or fewer characters,
4. Not be contrived to be pronounceable or to be “cute”,

and

5. Not be used in place of name in study publications or masthead listings.