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Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: Addendum to “Words you should never use when characterizing your trial”

I distributed a note dated 24 August containing a short list of words one should not use in characterizing one’s own trial:

Innovative
Definitive,
Original,
Unique,
Ground breaking.

The note generated comments from others.

Henry Blackburn added “leading edge”, “pioneering”, “breakthrough”, “successful”, “novel”, “hot-topic”, “visionary”, and “seminal”.

Jennifer Thorne keyed on “first”: “this is the first reported case of ...”

Bob Wise also keyed on “first”. He wrote:

On one of my first manuscripts, I wrote: “We are the first to demonstrate that...”. The reviewer who ultimately accepted the paper gave me the opprobrium: “Statements like this are not only presumptuous, they are also invariably wrong.”

I remember this critique very well, have passed it along to my younger colleagues, and I have avoided this wording since then.

Scott Zeger took a different tack by noting a need to pay attention to the lingo of the present administration by encouraging use of such terms as “incredible”, “amazing”, “classy”, “fantastic”, “great”, “huge”, “hugely classy”, “terrific”, “tremendous” and “unbelievable” when characterizing one’s own trial.