



29 March 2017

Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: A rose by any other name?

Shakespeare, in Romeo and Juliet, asks “What’s in a name?” and then notes “that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet”.

Indeed. Provided the name by which it goes does not cause one to overlook the flower and never smell its fragrance.

That is why studies that are trials should have titles with the word “trial” in them, leastwise they be missed and never smelled.

So how many papers indexed in PubMed to the publication type [randomized controlled trial] have titles with the word “trial” in them to allow readers to identify them as trials?

For insights we (Jill Meinert, Betty Collison, and myself) identified full length publications appearing in four high profile journals (NEJM, JAMA, Lancet, and BMJ) indexed as being randomized controlled trials and published in 2010 and in 2016 and then reviewed titles for the term “trial”.

Journals indexed to [randomized controlled trial] in PubMed with "trial" or "randomized" in the title

	2010		2016	
	No. pubs	No. with "trial" in title	No. pubs	No. with "trial" in title
NEJM	125	10	138	27
JAMA	50	45	67	66
Lancet	91	88	91	87
BMJ	59	55	12	12
Total	325	198	308	192

Clearly, the number of roses missed depend on the journal. Only a few of the titles in the NEJM include the terms “trial” compared to most of the articles in the other three journals.

Overall, there were 10,610 publications indexed to the publication type [randomized controlled trial] (as of 28 March 2017). Less than 40% (4,047) of those had “trial” as a word in the title.