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Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: Words to avoid

Guinea pig (in reference to persons enrolled in trials)

A person or group of persons enrolled in a trial considered to have violated existing ethics, norms, or standards of care. Usage is evocative and emotion-laden. Suggests needless experimentation so poorly done so as to have no benefit. Most uses have the effect of impugning the judgment of sponsors of the trial, institutional review boards responsible for the trials, and investigators doing the trial.

Subject (in reference to persons studied)

Term widely used in human research in experimental settings. Difficulty is the implication that persons are research objects. Term carries connotation of subjugation and, thus, at odds with the voluntary nature of the participation and requirements of consent and carries the connotation of use without benefit. Term suggests a passive relationship with study investigators when, in fact, the relationship is more akin to a partnership involving active cooperation.

Endpoint (in reference to outcome measures in trials)

A primary or secondary outcome measure, especially one recorded as an event such as death or a nonfatal event such as a myocardial infarction, that results in termination or alteration of treatment or followup of the person. Best avoided. Most “endpoints” over the course of followup are not indicators of “end” in regard to treatment or followup. Most protocols call for followup, and often treatment as well, over a defined period of time even in the presence of and following events. Use of the term can cause study personnel to stop followup if they regard the term as having operational meaning.

Data (plural)

I can abide data as a singular by lay people and the press, but not by trialists!

Self promoting language

Characterizations such as original or ground breaking in relation to one’s own work. Leave it to others to decide if the work is “original” or “ground breaking”.