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ON CANCER

Several reasons to take part in a clinical trial

By DR. CHRISTOPHER N. FRANTZ, Special to The News Journal

Clinical trials are research studies that test new drugs, new drug therapies that combine drugs, new surgical procedures, new radiation techniques and even complementary or alternative medicines.

Clinical trials have played a significant role in medical breakthroughs for cancer prevention, treatment and diagnosis. For instance, the Children's Oncology Group, a clinical trials cooperative devoted to childhood and adolescent cancers, estimates that successes in oncology treatment and care for childhood cancers have increased long-term survival rates by 65 percent to 70 percent.

If you or a loved one has been diagnosed with cancer, you may be wondering if a clinical trial is the right choice for you.

A Harris Interactive poll completed in 2000 concluded that eight out of 10 cancer patients were unaware that they could enroll in clinical trials. The research also reported that 76 percent of those unaware would have been somewhat or very receptive to participating in clinical trials.

Misconceptions also keep people from participating in clinical trials. Some cancer patients fear they might receive a placebo (dummy pill) in place of actual medication and end up not receiving treatment. In reality, patients in clinical trials receive the best available known treatment for their cancer or a new, and perhaps more effective, therapy.

Some people worry about being viewed as a "guinea pig." However, 97 percent of those who participated in clinical trials told the Harris

Interactive poll they were treated with dignity and respect and received excellent or good care.

Clinical trials are sometimes seen as a last resort for people who have no other treatment choices or as the only choice for people with rare cancers. Actually, some patients with common cancers choose to receive their first treatment course as part of a clinical trial.

Insurance coverage for clinical trials can vary, so it is important to know what is and is not covered before enrolling in a clinical trial.

There are several benefits to participating in a clinical trial. You may have access to treatment that may be safer or more effective, but that is not available outside of the study. Participation also may increase the total number of treatment options available to you. And your participation may benefit others through your contribution to cancer research.

Participating in a clinical trial is always voluntary; the decision is entirely up to you.

If you decide to investigate the option of enrolling in a clinical trial, several resources are available:

- The National Cancer Institute maintains a list of active clinical trials that can be accessed at www.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials, or by calling (800) 422-6237.
- The National Institutes of [Health](#) provides an extensive database of clinical trials at www.clinicaltrials.gov, although they are not all cancer-specific.
- The American Cancer Society works with the Coalition of Cancer Cooperative Groups to provide a free matching and referral service to patients seeking clinical trials. The Trial Check database can be found at www.cancer.org or can be accessed by calling (800) 303-5691.

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