

# Supporting Medical Research

Through advances in science and medical research, researchers and physicians have been able to offer new treatments, prevent illness, and answer many questions about health and the human body. These important advances were made possible thanks to the many research volunteers whose participation led to valuable information that can be applied to many people. The September 21, 2005, issue of *JAMA* is a theme issue dedicated to medical research.

## BECOMING INVOLVED

There are many ways to support medical research. You may choose to participate in a research study. By participating in a research study, you may receive free medical care and laboratory studies as well as receive treatments that may possibly prove beneficial before they are offered to others. You should, however, be well informed before considering participation in a research study since all studies vary in the benefits and risks involved (see "Before Participating in a Research Study"). You may make financial contributions to support finding treatments or discovering causes of certain illnesses. Many charitable organizations and universities involved in funding research rely on private contributions for their research **grants** (money awarded to researchers to pay for the costs of developing and performing research studies).

## BEFORE PARTICIPATING IN A RESEARCH STUDY

You should be told

- The purpose of the study
- Who is conducting the study
- Your right to participate, to not participate, or to drop out of the study
- How long the study will last and the amount of commitment involved
- Your duties as a participant
- How safety will be monitored
- If you experience harm during the study, how it will be handled
- Whether insurance or a grant will cover the costs

Contact your doctor if you are considering participating in a research study to be sure that any interventions you may receive as part of the study will not interfere with your ongoing treatment or care.

## INFORMED CONSENT

A potential research participant must be told about the study and informed about the potential risks and benefits and the alternatives to participating. The participant must acknowledge understanding and then provide his or her consent before participating. This often includes a written form that ensures that consent was granted and that the participant understood. It does not require the participant to remain in the study if he or she no longer desires to do so. Before a study can be conducted, the sponsor must obtain approval from an **ethics review committee**. Such committees are usually composed of a diverse group of physicians, scientists, and lay people who evaluate the study and ensure that the participants are not exposed to unnecessary or excessive risk and that the rights of participants are protected. In the United States, ethics review committees for biomedical research are under Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulation and are called **institutional review boards** (IRBs). In addition, the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) in the US Department of Health and Human Services ensures protection of the rights and interests of research participants.

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## INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on JAMA's Web site at [www.jama.com](http://www.jama.com). A Patient Page on cancer clinical trials was published in the June 9, 2004, issue; and one on participating in medical research studies was published in the February 7, 2001, issue.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like to participate in a research study, you can find opportunities at government Web sites such as:

- [www.health.nih.gov](http://www.health.nih.gov)
- [www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov)
- [www.cancer.gov/search/clinicaltrials](http://www.cancer.gov/search/clinicaltrials) (Cancer studies)
- [www.aidsinfo.nih.gov/clinical\\_trials](http://www.aidsinfo.nih.gov/clinical_trials) (HIV and AIDS studies)

The American Cancer Society provides a [worksheet](#) and offers information on its Web site, [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org), regarding insurance coverage for research studies.

Sources: National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute, Food and Drug Administration, Department of Health and Human Services, American Cancer Society

