
How can clinical trialists serve the needs of clinicians and patients more effectively?

Monday 25 June 2007

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CHALLENGES FOR A GENERAL PRACTITIONER AND MEDICAL COLUMNIST
13.45 – 14.05

BIOGRAPHY

Margaret McCartney qualified from Aberdeen University and is a GP in Glasgow and writes a column on health matters for the *Financial Times* 'Life and Arts' section on Saturdays.

ABSTRACT

Working as a general practitioner and medical columnist produces many shared challenges. It is my job not to dictate to people the decisions they should make about their health, but to act as a patient's advocate. This means I must provide and discuss fair information. Sometimes this is very difficult; for example, often there is scant evidence base for proposed treatments. At other times, the statistical information about outcomes, drawn from a variety of sources, is not provided as "neutral" and helpful, but emotive and dictative.

Evidence-based medicine represents a huge advance for patient care. However, it has to be delivered compassionately and helpfully, even when we acknowledge uncertainty and dubiety. "Numbers needed to treat" and "numbers needed to screen" are the kind of information I and my patients find useful, as it removes hype and allows us to make truly informed and rational decisions.

Many people lack fair information about health. This makes the delivery of equitable healthcare impossible. Professional researchers and doctors within the NHS should challenge this systematically

RELEVANT COMPETING INTERESTS

Grants/Research Support:	None
Consultant or Advisor:	None
Company financial interest:	None
Other:	I write for the Financial Times but trust this is not a conflict of interest