

Newspaper Advertisements, News Stories and Subject Recruitment: Is DSRB Review Required?

Background

In research, newspaper advertisements, posters and brochures are common tools used to improve recruitment. Such recruitment tools would need to follow DSRB's guidelines* for advertising and requires DSRB approval prior to use.

Sometimes, in the midst of interviews, researchers may mention their research projects to reporters and journalists. Generally, such news stories should be backed by evidence, convey clinical equipoise about the research interventions and should not mislead the public by over-emphasising any treatment benefits associated with the research. These stories in newspapers or magazines mentioning the research project are not considered direct advertising and will not require DSRB review. Researchers also do not need to submit news stories for DSRB review prior to publication. Researchers will only need to notify DSRB and submit a copy of the printed information for acknowledgement upon print.

However, in the event where there is intent to recruit participants and release recruitment details through the news article, researchers should inform journalists of the DSRB guidelines for advertising and ensure adherence to these guidelines where feasible.

*Guidelines for Preparing Advertisements

Any advertisements to recruit subjects should be limited to the information the prospective subjects need to determine their eligibility and interest. The following information must be included:

- That volunteers are being recruited for research,
- The name and address of the institution conducting the research,
- The condition under study and/or the purpose of the research,
- In summary form, the criteria that will be used to determine eligibility for the study,
- A brief list of participation benefits, if any (e.g. a no cost health examination),
- The time or other commitment required of the subjects,
- The location of the research and the person or office to contact for further information

The advertisement should not, either explicitly or implicitly:

- State or imply a certainty of favourable outcome or other benefits beyond what is outlined in the consent document and protocol,
- Make claims that the drug, device or biologic is safe or effective for the purposes under investigation,
- Make claims that the test article is known to be equivalent or superior to any other drug, biologic or device,
- Use terms such as "new treatment," "new medication" or "new drug" without explaining that the test article is investigational,
- Promise "free medical treatment," when the intent is only to say subjects will not be charged for taking part in the investigation. Advertisements may state that subjects will be paid, but should not emphasize the payment by such means as larger or bold type. Advertisements should not state the amount that will be paid, or
- Include any exculpatory language,
- Make claims, either explicitly or implicitly, about the drug, biologic or device under investigation that are inconsistent with currently approved labelling.

References:

- NHG Investigator's Manual 2nd Edition*

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