

Our national clinical trials registry hits 10,000

Since 2005, the University of Sydney has hosted the Australian New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry (ANZCTR). The registry has grown steadily during that time and late last year hit a major milestone: the 10,000th trial was registered!

The 10,000th trial is called 'Baby Steps'. It will test whether an interactive internet program and text messaging will help distressed new parents cope better with baby care and improve their wellbeing. The trial will also see if levels of postnatal depression can be lowered and whether the program is cost effective (see: www.ANZCTR.org.au/ACTRN12614001256662.aspx). Like many clinical trials nowadays, 'Baby Steps' is funded by one organisation (Beyond Blue), coordinated by another (Queensland University of Technology), involves researchers from every State and Territory, and can be accessed by anyone in Australia.

The 10,000th trial is a great example of how clinical trials are not just about testing whether new drugs work. There are many other interventions that may improve our health, including surgical procedures, lifestyle programs, health advice, rehabilitation strategies, complementary therapies, new medical devices, screening tests and many more. All these interventions need to be tested fairly to see if they do more good than harm, and the best way to do this is by conducting a clinical trial - see: www.testingtreatments.org

Registering all trials before they begin (known as 'prospective trial registration') is important to health. It is a way of disclosing all research involving humans. It gives everyone the right to know what research is being done and if any results might be missing from published science.

'The registry improves the efficiency and value of trials research in Australia', explains manager A/Prof Lisa Askie. 'It minimises duplication of research effort and reduces the potential bias that can be introduced if health care professionals only rely on published evidence as a basis for choosing treatments. We know that only about half of all research that is undertaken actually gets published. We also know that published research is more likely to contain positive results. But we need to know about all trials that are conducted - even if they show that a treatment does not work or is harmful, the so-called 'negative' findings. That's why all trials need to be registered and their results reported.' See www.alltrials.net

There are trial registries in several countries, but the Australasian registry, based at the CTC, was one of the first to be endorsed by the World Health Organisation [www.who.int/ictrp]. Now almost 10 years old, the ANZCTR has been a major part of the worldwide initiative to make all clinical trial information publicly available.

The registry is a valuable and free resource which enables patients and health professionals to access information about which clinical trials are taking place across all areas of health care. Anyone can search the ANZCTR online and find out about clinical trials that are about to begin, are under way or have been completed. Data from the ANZCTR is also uploaded to other websites, such as the Australian Clinical Trials (www.australianclinicaltrials.gov.au) website and the consumer-friendly Australian Cancer Trials (www.australiancancertrials.gov.au) site. Access to such information helps people find suitable trials which they can join, and this ultimately contributes to better health for all Australians.

The ANZCTR is freely available at www.anzctr.org.au

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