

The Issues: Perspectives from Practice

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The perspective of the practitioner brings a different flavor to clinical trials. There are notable exceptions, but the majority of practitioners view clinical trials as three very separate people: first as a businessman, secondly as a clinician and thirdly as a professional.

The practitioner as businessman is operating a business where profit margins are coming under increasing pressure. Further complicating this viewpoint is increasing competition from record numbers of veterinary graduates entering private practice annually.

On occasion, the practitioner as businessman merchandises his clinical trial position in an effort to "sell" his clients service or product or both. We are all acquainted with alleged "scientific statements" which in actual fact are self aggrandizing advertisements. On the other hand, the good (i.e., successful) businessman practitioner usually is more valuable to the objectives of a clinical trial than the mediocre or less successful businessman practitioner.

The second viewpoint, that of practitioner as clinician, involves the strong, practical, scientific and applicable uses that are so important to a trial. Because the true clinician is interested in all applications and effects of the product, the risks here involve non label, unrelated and even placebo uses of the trial product. This can be valuable and I am sure that important contributions have been made this way, but I also am sure that it dilutes the true effect and effort of the trial.

The practitioner as professional is my semantic label for a discussion of the increased and increasing accountability of veterinary practitioners. This area includes the trial sponsor, the FDA, the client and even humane and ecologic groups who may imagine or suspect abuses by the profession. This viewpoint calls for heightened vigilance by all parties not only because of the increased number of potential claimants but also the increased number of claims (valid or not) and finally, by the increased cost of the claims and their defense.

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Clearly, the optimum situation for clinical trials is an amalgam of the strong points of all three types and hopefully a dilution or at least diminution of the less desirable features. It probably won't be the same individual for all instances. My sense is that success not only breeds success, but follows success from one area to the next. That is to say the successful businessman veterinarian is also most likely to be an effective clinician, investigator and true professional. This is the individual to seek out and use.