



Can Medicare and Medicaid Patients Participate in a Clinical Trial?

Mark Fleury, PhD
Policy Principal
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN)

Please remember the opinions expressed on Patient Power are not necessarily the views of our sponsors, contributors, partners or Patient Power. Our discussions are not a substitute for seeking medical advice or care from your own doctor. That's how you'll get care that's most appropriate for you.

Laura Levaas:

If you're on Medicare or Medicaid, what do you even do if you're presented with the option to participate in a clinical trial to treat your condition? Let's talk with Mark Fleury. Hi, Mark.

Mark Fleury:

Hello, Laura. Thanks for having me on.

Laura Levaas:

Yeah. We're so, so grateful to have you on our program today because you have such a deep knowledge in this industry and on this topic. Can you tell us real briefly what exactly you do for the Cancer Action Network? And then I'd like to talk to you about barriers around Medicare and Medicaid.

Mark Fleury:

Sure. So, I work for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. We're the policy and advocacy arm of the American Cancer Society, and we focus on public policy, so that's regulation, laws that impact cancer patients. And specifically, my work deals with policies around research and drug and device development, so how can we get those findings that happen in the laboratory into the clinic. And specifically, that goes through clinical trials. So, I've spent the last couple of years with a large partnership of other stakeholders taking a really deep dive into looking at clinical trials and all of the challenges patients have in getting themselves enrolled as a part of those trials.

Laura Levaas:

Good. We look forward to hearing more. Can you tell us a little bit about the current state of clinical trial participation in the U.S. right now?

Mark Fleury:

Sure. So, there's not real solid numbers, but we believe somewhere between 6 to 7 percent of U.S. cancer patients participate in a clinical trial right now. So, that's a fairly low number overall, and it's also a fairly low proportion of the patients who would be interested. Research has found that between 50 and 70 percent of patients would say yes to participating in a clinical trial if they were asked. But unfortunately, many are not asked. And some of those who are

asked are unable to enroll for a variety of external reasons. One of the things that we do know is that the people who do enroll in clinical trials tend to be less diverse and better off financially than the overall population with cancer.

Laura Levaas:

Okay. What are some of the barriers around Medicare and Medicaid patients who want to get involved in a clinical trial?

Mark Fleury:

Sure. So, obviously, first of all, there has to be a clinical trial for the patient based on your clinical characteristics. But assuming that that is the case, for a patient to enroll in a clinical trial, it's critical that their insurance cover the routine care costs of that clinical trial. In other words, there are costs in a clinical trial that a patient would see regardless if they were in a clinical trial not. Say, for example, the first step of any treatment is a surgery and then the second step in normal care would be one drug but in a clinical trial it's a different drug.

Well, regardless, you're always gonna get the surgery. It's important that insurance cover that routine part of the clinical trial. And unfortunately, historically, that's not always been the case. Fortunately, in Medicare, they have covered that since 2000. That is not the case universally for Medicaid.

Please remember the opinions expressed on Patient Power are not necessarily the views of our sponsors, contributors, partners or Patient Power. Our discussions are not a substitute for seeking medical advice or care from your own doctor. That's how you'll get care that's most appropriate for you.