Trial & Error

Drug trials need black patients. What to ask before signing up.

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Clinical trials test new and existing medical advances on patients for safety and effectiveness. They were first performed only on white men, but researchers now know that race, gender and ethnicity can influence meds' performance and side effects. So the government, pharmaceutical companies and even black doctors actively recruit black participants.

Though clinical trials are vital, all research comes with risks. One of every 30 test patients will experience a serious side effect, and one in 10,000 will die as a result of the experiment, according to CenterWatch.com. Less than 200 FDA officials monitor patient safety at more than 350,000 sites, and thousands of private-company trials have no federal oversight at all. So how can we further research without risking our health?

- Ask what advantages the experimental treatment offers over existing treatments.
- Review the informed-consent form with your family before you sign it—or have them present when you do.
- Ask who pays if something goes wrong and you need extra medical care.
- Can you change your mind and opt out after enrolling?

For more information, call 888.346.3656, or visit clinicaltrials.gov.
