

Breakout Session: Participation to an Ethics Committee

Outline:

You will be representatives of an ethics board of a hospital. A clinical trial has been submitted and you will have to identify and discuss ethical aspects. At the beginning of the session, each of you will be assigned one of the roles specified below. (Note that this may mean you have to provide arguments you normally would not provide.)

Timeline:

5 minutes: Read introduction

45 minutes: Discussion on the protocol (in role)

Questions to address:

- This is a trial in children. Is there a need to test this drug in children?
- Is the trial set up acceptable (placebo group)?
- The drug has some safety issues – is the disease severe enough to justify this?
- Is the burden of the trial acceptable?
- Other things that stand out/need discussing?

Introduction: Compound x is currently approved and marketed for severe psoriasis in adults (>16 years). As part of the pediatric investigational plan, the company developing compound x also wants to test this in children (10-16 years) suffering from severe psoriasis.

Background: Psoriasis is a skin condition characterized by redness, flaky skin, itchiness and pain on affected parts of the body. In addition, patients often feel ashamed about their condition. For many patients treatment with steroid creams will work well. However, there is a subgroup of patients who do not respond to standard care. In this trial patients between 10-16 years will be included who are not responsive to standard care and who have more than 20% of the skin affected.

What is known from trials in adults: Compound x is an oral drug that needs to be taken 3 times per day by patients with psoriasis who are not responsive to other therapies (e.g. steroid creams). It reduces redness and itchiness significantly and resulted in a reduction of affected areas by 50% or more in 3 months (compared to an increase of 5% observed in the placebo group). Side effects observed are diarrhea (mainly in the first 2 weeks of treatment) and mild nausea (30 minutes after ingestion). Toxicity studies in animal models have revealed that the compound is safe postnatally. However, in pregnant rats, it resulted in severe growth retardation of the embryos. As such, the drug should not be prescribed to pregnant women.

Proposed trial in children:

1. Patients may have tried alternative medicines for psoriasis in the past, but should not have used any in the past 3 months. Eligible candidates will have an evaluation to establish whether at least 20% of the skin surface is affected. For this children will have to undress completely (parent present until patients are 14 years of age, above that children can opt not to have a parent present).
2. Patients (target n=45) entering the trial will be randomized over the placebo group or the treatment group (1:2 randomization).
3. Patients will have check ups at day 1, 8, 15, 29, 57 and 85 (end of study). During these check ups the affected area will be measured. Furthermore, a general check up will be done (weight, blood pressure etc.) and bloods samples will be obtained (2 small tubes (5 ml each) for safety monitoring. Patients and parents will receive a questionnaire on the wellbeing of the child which addresses both the occurrence of anticipated gastrointestinal side effects and the anticipated positive effects on their condition. On day 1, 29, 57 and 85 a full physical exam will be performed. These days the visits are anticipated to take 4-6 hours. On the other days the visits are anticipated to take 2-4 hours.
4. Given the safety concerns in pregnancy all female participants have to take oral anti-conceptive medication 1 month prior to the initiation of the trial until 2 months after the trial.

Roles:

1. **Chair** (your role is to coordinate the discussion and make sure all people are heard – you start by doing a round of introduction so everyone's role is clear to all)
2. **Conservative catholic priest** (no sexual intercourse before marriage)
3. **Teacher at a primary school** (2 years ago a 12 year old girl got pregnant in a class of your colleague)
4. **Mother of a child with very severe psoriasis** (>60% of body affected, not responsive to any treatment so far) – you are not normally part of this board, but have been asked to participate due to your personal expertise with this topic
5. **Patient representative** (presenting the voice of the patients – you have severe hemophilia and are strongly in favor of trials for pediatric diseases – there are far too few of those)
6. **Hospital representative:** surgeon (asked by your superior to be part of this board – you are actually too busy and too important for this – feel free to check emails while doing the roleplay)
7. **Dermatologist** (have seen many young patients with this condition and you find it really important that these patients are offered a treatment)
8. **Ethicist** (you studied philosophy and are by nature a very concerned person)
9. **Scientist** (you think ethical discussion are a waste of time and in the way of scientific progress)