Lay public's understanding of equipoise and randomisation in randomised controlled trials


Record Status
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Citation

Authors' objectives
This study aims to research the lay public's understanding of equipoise and randomisation in randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and to look at why information on this may not be not taken in or remembered, as well as the effects of providing information designed to overcome barriers.

Authors' conclusions
This research was not carried out in real healthcare settings. However, participants who could correctly identify random allocation methods, yet judged random allocation unacceptable, doubted the possibility of individual equipoise and saw no scientific benefits of random allocation over doctor/patient choice, are unlikely to draw upon contrasting views if invited to enter a real clinical trial. This suggests that many potential trial participants may have difficulty understanding and remembering trial information that conforms to current best practice in its descriptions of randomisation and equipoise. Given the extent of the disparity between the assumptions underlying trial design and the assumptions held by the lay public, the solution is unlikely to be simple. Nevertheless, the results suggest that including an accessible explanation of the scientific benefits of randomisation may be beneficial provided potential participants are also enabled to reflect on the trials aim of advancing knowledge, and to think actively about the information presented. Further areas for consideration include: the identification of effective combinations of written and oral information; helping participants to reflect on the aim of advancing knowledge; and an evidence-based approach to leaflet construction.

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