

What am I Missing Here?

Thought-Provoking Questions for the Clinical Research Industry

By Norman M. Goldfarb

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When setting subject stipends, we have to work within three constraints: (1) They can't be too large because that would be coercive. (2) They can't be too small because enrollment will suffer and subjects should not be subsidizing the trial. (3) They can't discriminate (except for out-of-pocket travel expenses) because that would be unfair to subjects receiving the smaller amounts. Given the diversity of subject populations, there is no stipend number that works for every subject: Some people have hourly jobs while others are retired; some people have insurance while others don't; some people have low pain thresholds while others have high ones; some people are looking for therapy while others want to help their community. Until we relax at least one of the constraints, we are going to stay in this box. One possibility would be to ask potential subjects to propose their own stipends. If the number is reasonable within IRB-approved guidelines, let them have it; if not, cut them loose. The Belmont Report includes the principle of "respect for persons." Let's give them the respect of having some say in setting their own stipends. What am I missing here?

Do you know a better way? Is something getting under your skin? Please send your ideas for future columns to ngoldfarb@firstclinical.com.

Author

Norman M. Goldfarb is Managing Director of First Clinical Research LLC, a provider of clinical research best practices information, consulting and training services. Contact him at 1.650.465.0119 or ngoldfarb@firstclinical.com.