

## "Cancer Clinical Trials: A Commonsense Guide to Experimental Cancer Therapies and Clinical Trials"

**Tomasz M. Beer and Larry W. Axmaker, 2012, 166 pages, DiaMedica, \$16.95**

**Review by Norman M. Goldfarb**

"Cancer Clinical Trials: A Commonsense Guide to Experimental Cancer Therapies and Clinical Trials" is a remarkably understandable, practical and thorough guide for cancer patients and their families and advisors. The book is also an excellent resource for clinical research professionals tasked with explaining such notoriously complex research.

This book has been selected for  
[The First Clinical Research Bookshelf](#)  
Essential reading for clinical research professionals

The following excerpt demonstrates how the book presents a complex topic simply but without oversimplifying or talking down to the reader:

### **CLINICAL TRIALS VERSUS STANDARD CARE**

You may be thinking, "Why would I want to try a treatment that might or might not help me?" You may be right. *If there is an effective standard treatment that works for you, there is no reason for you to enter into a trial.* Here are some explanations that might help.

In many ways, clinical trials and standard care for cancer are similar. Both require you to visit doctors and nurses, take medications, have blood tests, have body and possibly brain scans, have regular physical exams, have needles inserted in tender places, and undergo many other procedures and indignities. For those of you who are just beginning cancer treatment, a great many unknowns will exist, in both experimental and standard treatments. After all, you have not done this before. You will encounter a lot of new information, face new treatments and unfamiliar tests, and have unexpected experiences. You could look at it as a new adventure in your life, although not an adventure you ever wished for!

Whoever came up with the term *standard* treatment didn't consider that, although it may be standard procedure for your doctor, nothing could be further from what *you* might consider standard. The whole process can be frightening.

Treatment for cancer — whether standard or experimental — usually involves side effects, expenses, testing and a lot of your time. Standard treatments become standard when they are shown, in large clinical trials, to be better than the previously accepted standard. By *better* we mean that the entire group of patients who received the standard treatment generally fared better than the entire group of patients who received the treatment it replaced. This does *not* mean that every patient benefitted equally, and some people may not have benefitted at all. Standard treatments may involve a fair amount of uncertainty as to your personal outcome.

Even when you are beginning a treatment that is considered standard for your type of cancer, you will likely hear that a certain chance exists that you will benefit from it, often expressed as a percentage of people who remain cancer-free or whose cancers are under control a number of years after treatment. Hopefully, the chances

of success are high, but they are almost never 100 percent, and often they are disappointingly low. When you participate in a clinical trial, generally less is known about the probabilities of various outcomes.

New treatments are needed because we don't yet have perfect cancer treatments. So, although there are more unknowns when you consider experimental therapy, they are often similar to those that you face when you receive standard therapy. It will be important for you to understand both options in order to make the right or best choice for you.

The book includes 10 chapters:

- What Is Cancer and How Is It Treated?
- What Is a Clinical Trial?
- The Types of Clinical Trials: Four Phases and More
- Randomized Trials and Placebos
- Clinical Trials That Have Changed Cancer Care
- Is There a Clinical Trial That's Right for Me?
- Who Is Looking Out for You and What Can You Expect?
- Who Pays for Clinical Trials and What Can They Cost?
- Cancer Drugs Currently in Use and Being Tested in Trials
- The Future of Cancer Treatment and Clinical Trials: Personalized Medicine

The book is available in bookstores.

### **Reviewer**

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