Health Bulletin

Clinical Trials Fuel Advancements in Stroke Treatment

(NAPSA)—Despite his diabetes, high blood pressure and being overweight, Joe Guerra didn't pay too much attention to his health. That is, until one day his speech became slurred and he lost hand coordination.

Guerra rushed to see his family doctor. The surprising diagnosis was a mild stroke. It was then that Guerra decided to make every effort to be healthy, a decision made easier by his doctor, who recommended him for a stroke prevention trial.

Like thousands of Americans who join clinical trials every year, Guerra's decision turned his life around. "I didn't want anything to happen again. Anything, I can do to prevent another stroke," said Guerra.

Clinical trials research drugs, medical devices or therapies, determining their safety and effectiveness. New treatments and therapies are first tested on animals before being tested on people. The government estimates that, on average, it takes more than eight years to test a new drug before it is approved for the general public.

Stroke clinical trials are crucial because only limited treatments are currently available for stroke patients. According to Dr. Wayne Clark, director of the Oregon Stroke Center in Portland and spokesperson for the National Stroke Association, "Some diseases, like pneumonia, have maybe 20 different antibiotics that we know will work. But with stroke, we're really at the beginning steps here, so we need to figure out which treatments will work [to treat stroke]."

Questions to ask before joining a clinical trial:

- What is the purpose of the study?
- Who is sponsoring the trial?
- Who has reviewed and approved the study?
- How do the possible risks and benefits of the study compare with approved treatments for my illness?
- Will there by any financial burden for participating?
- Is a placebo being used?

provided by National Stroke Association

Strict U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guidelines protect clinical trial participants. Every study is monitored for the least possible risk to study volunteers.

After animal testing, Phase I trials test treatments on a handful of people to evaluate the drug's safety, dosage and side effects. Phase II involves further testing on a larger group of patients. In Phase III, treatment is given to several thousand people, confirming previous findings and comparing it to currently available treatments. Phase IV studies the treatment's long-term effects.

National Stroke Association wants all patients to ask their doctors before volunteering to join a clinical trial.

Additionally, the FDA requires that study participants receive and sign an "informed consent" statement that explains risks, benefits and alternative treatments in a study. Even after signing an informed consent form, volunteers may leave a clinical trial at any time and shouldn't encounter any negative response from their medical provider.

There are several factors to consider before participating in a clinical study. Some participants may only receive a placebo or sugar pill. While many clinical trials provide monetary compensation, some do not. If not, patients need to consider if they can afford the travel and time required.

The level of care in a clinical trial is very high, according to researchers. "You've got professionals to help you continue as healthy a life as you can," says Guerra.

Anyone interested in participating in a clinical trial should contact the FDA at 301-827-4460 or www.clinicaltrials.gov. Currently, there are more than 130 clinical trials involving stroke research. For more stroke information, contact National Stroke Association at 1-800-STROKES or www.stroke.org.