

BEH PODCAST EPISODE 43

DOES IT HELP ME TO JOIN A CLINICAL TRIAL?

Today, we are going to cover the last of our “should ask” questions that I was proposing that people should be asking. This is a more general discussion, and the question today is whether it is advisable that they get involved in a clinical trial, specifically for their eyes, but really for anything medical. In general, my recommendation is no, I would not get involved in a clinical trial. About the only time I would recommend that is if you had a truly life-threatening disease where the only possible chance of survival was to get involved in a clinical trial. Even then, my answer is still a qualified maybe. If that situation arose, we'd have to talk.

The whole discussion of clinical trials is complicated by the fact that the nature of medical research has become a little bit controversial. Controversial in terms of how studies are set up. Controversial in terms of what even is the placebo. The simplest way to think about this, and what I would propose to you is that I would not encourage anyone to run to get to the front of the line for a new and unproven study. In a clinical study, there is a very good likelihood that you would be in the non-treated group, the placebo group. You might go through a lot of time and a lot of effort and not even really receive any kind of treatment, so it would delay your chance to do something positive for yourself.

The other reason and the other thing that's changed about clinical studies is that in the old days, it used to be considered that you were doing a great favor to the field of medicine and medical research if you would step forward to take part in a clinical study. Now, the clinical studies are number one, mainly designed to get a drug on the market. There's virtually no clinical research for any of the kinds of therapies and treatments that I would propose as a first line of therapy for most diseases. They're not free anymore. Very often, you're paying for the meds, the visits and even some of the lab tests. Alternatively, they might be charging your insurance company so you're paying the copays. There is a huge amount of time involved, invasive studies, lab work, blood sticks, meal sticks and possibly even paying for the doctor's time. I'm glad that studies are being done in general, but that's why I'm not a big proponent of a lot of these studies.

Another issue is that a lot of studies are being done overseas. They're being done in 3rd world countries. Part of the reason for that is that it's cheaper there, you can pay people a small stipend, a small token to get them involved. The bad news of that setup is that when a study doesn't work out, the data, including adverse effects is hidden. The drug companies are very selective about only showing you results that they think are positive and that benefit their product.