Conducting clinical trials in the UK

Video transcript

What are clinical trials?

The University of Gasgow's Research Regulation and Compliance team provide guidance and advice on the regulation of clinical trials of drugs or drug combinations, Research Governance Framework Studies, and studies involving human tissue or healthy volunteers.

A Clinical Trial of an Investigational Medicinal Product, or CTIMP for short, is a study that evaluates the safety or efficacy of a drug or Investigational Medicinal Product or aims to obtain any other information about the drug such as how it is absorbed, distributed, metabolised or excreted. These trials are complex and require input from a variety of specialties to ensure they are carefully and appropriately designed. In order to conduct clinical trials, the Sponsor and Chief Investigator must first ensure that the procedures involved comply with the appropriate UK regulations and obtain all the necessary permissions.

Authorisation must first be received from the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and an NHS Research Ethics Committee or REC for short. The Health Research Authority or HRA is in charge of approving clinical trials in England and Wales, while, in Scotland, clinical trials must receive management approval from the Research and Innovation or Development departments of the participating health boards – this will be facilitated by the NHS Research Scotland Permissions Coordinating Centre. Trials with sites in the EU may be subject to additional requirements.

What documentation is needed?

To apply for a clinical trial authorization (CTA) from the MHRA, all clinical trial submission packages should contain a list of documents, provided in the description. Moreover, to receive a favourable opinion from an NHS REC, each investigator must submit a number of documents for ethical approval, as outlined in the accordion below. All of the study documents must be reviewed and authorised by the study sponsor before submission.

Timeline of review and trial initiation.

On receipt of a valid submission, the MHRA and REC follow specific timelines for the review process, ranging from 30 to 90 days, depending on the nature of the trial.

After you receive authorization from the MHRA, approval from a recognized REC, the relevant management approvals have been obtained, and the sponsor has issued the Regulatory Green Light, you can begin your clinical trial. After receiving all approvals, you must register the clinical trial in a publicly accessible database. Registration should occur

before the first participant is recruited and no later than six weeks after the recruitment of the first participant. CTIMPs and trials combining medicinal products and medical devices submitted after the 1st of January 2022 are automatically registered on the ISRCTN registry as part of the combined review process. The registry provides content validation and curation and the unique identification number necessary for the publication of your study. You should also make arrangements for a data safety and monitoring board, known as a data monitoring committee in the UK. They are in charge of assessing the progress of a clinical trial, including the safety data and the critical efficacy endpoints at intervals, and of recommending to the sponsor whether to continue, modify, or stop a trial.

Amendments

Amendments are any changes made to a research project after approval from a review body has been given. They should first be discussed with the study sponsor, who will confirm if the amendment is substantial or non-substantial and therefore if it needs approval or notification, and from which review bodies. Researchers should complete an Amendment Tool, detailing each change involved, which must be reviewed and authorised by the sponsor representative before submission. Only once the relevant review bodies have approved the amendment, may the change be initiated.

Safety and progress reporting

During the clinical trial, you must submit Development Safety Update Reports to the MHRA. This should include:

1. A cover letter.
2. An analysis of the trial participants' safety including the ongoing risk or benefit.
3. A list of all suspected serious adverse reactions.

Remember that a condition of REC approval will be the submission of an Annual Progress Report, due on the anniversary of the Favourable Opinion, not the start of the study. The HRA website provides a specific Annual Progress Report Template for CTIMPs relating to completion and submission of this report.

When ending the study, you must notify the MHRA and REC in writing that a clinical trial has ended within 90 days of its conclusion, by providing an End of Trial Notification form. In Scotland, the relevant NHS R&I and R&D offices will also require notification in accordance with local policies and procedures. Your submission must include the appropriate end of trial form, provided at the links below, and a cover letter. You are also required to publish the summary of your results within one year after the completion of the clinical trial. A final report must then be submitted to the REC via the online webform within one year of the trial's completion, including a plain language summary of the key findings. These will then be published on HRA's website alongside the study research summaries. And remember, it is always good practice to keep your participants informed of the outcomes of your study.

Closing.

The regulation & management of clinical trials is a lengthy and complex process. For extra support and information, get in touch with the Translational Research Initiative, the Research Regulation and Compliance Team, or visit our web pages.