## Early Phase Trials: Goals and Questions

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1

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## Financial Disclosures

- The presenter hereby discloses the following relationships:
  - Berry Consultants, LLC
    - Multiple clients
  - Support from
    - Octapharma AG
    - National Institutes of Health/NINDS
- This presentation will include information on investigational use of L-carnitine that is not yet approved for the treatment of sepsis
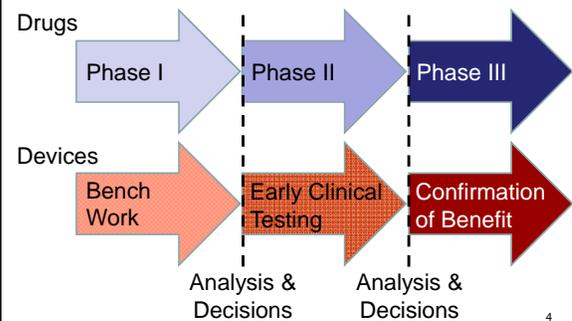
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## What is an Early Phase Trial?

- Demonstrating a treatment is adequately effective and safe to warrant clinical adoption generally requires defining the right
  - Population(s)
  - Disease(s)
  - Treatment strategy (e.g. timing, dose, route)
  - Outcome (i.e., responsive to treatment and relevant)
  - Confirmatory trial design
- Early phase trials are designed to reduce uncertainty in these areas, allowing a definitive or successful confirmatory trial to be run

3

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## Trial "Phases" in Drugs and Devices



Drugs

Phase I → Phase II → Phase III

Devices

Bench Work → Early Clinical Testing → Confirmation of Benefit

Analysis & Decisions          Analysis & Decisions

4

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## What is an Early Phase Trial?

- General concept: Learn versus confirm
- Learn (e.g, phase I, phase II)
  - Greater flexibility and number of questions/goals
  - Willingness to tolerate higher error rates and sources of bias
  - Not just underpowered confirmatory trials
- Confirm (e.g., phase III)
  - Rigid control of error rates (i.e., type I rate and power)
  - Prespecification and single primary question/outcome
  - Setting for the traditional 1:1 randomized RCT

5

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## Early Phase Question: 1

- Can the drug be tolerated?
  - Traditional dose-escalation question
  - Healthy versus diseased population
  - Is the maximum tolerated dose (MTD) of clinical interest
  - Pharmacokinetics versus pharmacodynamics
  - Trial Designs:
    - 3+3 (historical interest)
    - Continual reassessment method (CRM)

6

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## Early Phase Question: 2

- Can we establish "proof of concept"?
  – Addresses underlying assumptions regarding proposed mechanism of action (e.g., does the drug bind the target receptor, does the drug pass the blood-brain barrier)
  – Assumption is that treatment strategy will not work without this criterion being met (i.e., necessary but not sufficient for success)
  – <u>Trial design</u>: dose ranging/biomarker or assay

7

## Early Phase Question 3:

- What dose(s) should be investigated further?
  – Potentially useful doses may span a range of several logs
  – Dose selection often requires balance of efficacy and toxicity
  – Common mistake to narrow the dose range under consideration too early
  – <u>Trial design</u>: Dose finding trials with assessment of efficacy and toxicity (e.g., adaptive dose finding trial)

8

## Early Phase Question 4:

- What outcome(s) should be measured?
  – Consider likelihood of effect on an outcome versus clinical importance (patient centered)
  – Consider practical issues, timing of follow up and difficulty in assessment
  – Reliability and prior validation or use of outcome measures
  – Can consider multiple outcomes, but with risk of false positive result due to "cherry picking"
  – <u>Trial design</u>: Intervention/multiple outcomes

9

## Early Phase Question 5:

- What disease state(s) should be studied?
  – Consider availability of subjects, confounding factors and treatments, and established outcome measures
  – Common to run multiple phase II trials of the same agent in different diseases
  – <u>Trial design</u>: "Indication finding trial" with multiple diseases enrolled simultaneously to leverage investment in sites and personnel (e.g., using an integrated statistical approach)

10

## Early Phase Question 6:

- What population should be enrolled?
  – Narrow population:
    - Less variability and easier to interpret results
    - Difficult to enroll required sample size and less clinical relevance
  – Broad population
    - Increased variability, confounding factors
    - Concerns regarding heterogeneity of the treatment effect (HTE) and low power to detect
  – To inform the design of a confirm phase trial, you need to enroll a confirm phase population

11

## Early Phase Question 7:

- How should a confirmatory study be designed, implemented, and analyzed?
  – Learn phase trials should be conducted as similarly to confirm phase trials if they are to inform confirm phase trial design and conduct
  – Same population, treatments, and outcomes
  – Adequate sample size to answer key questions needed to design confirmatory trial

12

## Early Phase Question 8:

- Should a confirmatory study be conducted at all?
  - We should only run confirmatory trials that have a substantial chance of showing benefit
  - <u>Key concept</u>: predictive power—the probability of a positive confirmatory trial, considering all the remaining uncertainties
  - Possible counter-example: trials of treatments to prevent Alzheimer's disease

13
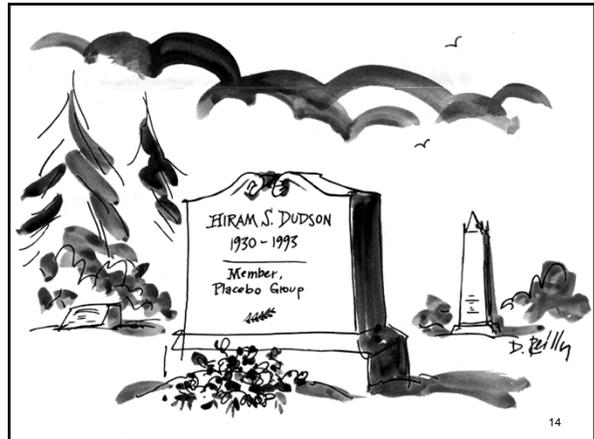


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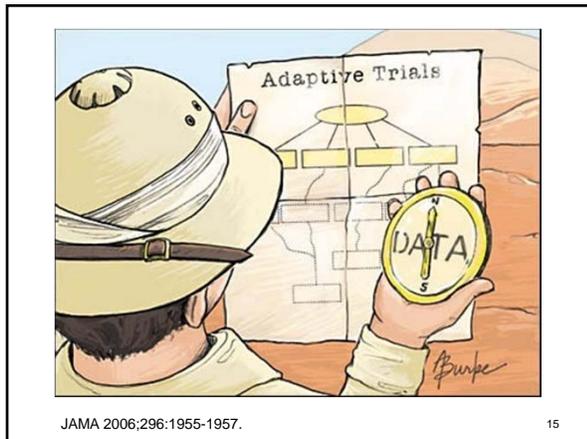


JAMA 2006;296:1955-1957.

15

## L-Carnitine and Sepsis

- Clinical setting
  - Adult patients with severe sepsis or shock
  - Phase II, dose-finding trial of L-carnitine to improve end organ function and survival
- Goals
  - Identify most promising dose
  - Determine if L-carnitine should be evaluated in a confirmatory, phase III trial
  - Enroll more patients to doses most likely to be beneficial, based on accumulating information

16

## L-Carnitine and Sepsis

- Background
  - L-carnitine is believed to work through reducing multi-organ system failure
  - Multi-organ system failure quantified by SOFA score
  - Baseline SOFA is key predictor of mortality
  - Reduction in SOFA over 48 hours is desired proximate treatment effect
  - Reduction in 28-day mortality would be registration endpoint

17

## Adaptive Trial Structure

- Outcome measures
  - Proximate: $\Delta$ SOFA score
  - Definitive: Survival to 28 days
- Structure of trial
  - 4 arms (0 g, 6 g, 12 g, and 18 g) with dose-response model
  - Maximum sample size of 250 subjects
  - Interim analyses at 40 subjects, then every 12
  - Subjects randomized according to probability that the dose results in the best (negative) $\Delta$ SOFA
  - May be stopped early for futility or success, based on probability that best dose improves SOFA and would be successful in phase III

18

**Operating Characteristics of Proposed Trial Design: Results of Monte Carlo Simulations**

| | No Effect (Null) | | Mild Effect | | Strong Effect | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Assumed Treatment Effects for Simulations | | | | | | |
| | ΔSOFA | Mortality | ΔSOFA | Mortality | ΔSOFA | Mortality |
| Outcome: Control | 0 | 40% | 0 | 40% | 0 | 40% |
| Outcome: 6 g | 0 | 40% | 0 | 40% | -1 | 34% |
| Outcome: 12 g | 0 | 40% | -1 | 34% | -2 | 28% |
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| Trial Performance | | | | | | |
| Probability of Positive Trial | 0.043 (type I error) | | 0.911 (power) | | 0.999 | |
| Probability of Stopping Early | For futility: 0.431 For success: 0.023 | | For futility: 0.001 For success: 0.679 | | For futility: 0.000 For success: 0.981 | |
| Average Req'd Sample Size | 198.0 | | 172.4 | | 119.5 | |
| Probability of Selecting 18 g | 0.35 | | 0.99 | | 1.00 | |

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| Probability of Selecting 18 g | 0.35 | | 0.99 | | 1.00 | |
| Average Allocation of Subjects Between Treatment Arms – n per arm (%) | | | | | | |
| Control | 62.7 (32%) | | 54.1 (31%) | | 36.5 (31%) | |
| 6 g | 47.0 (24%) | | 13.8 (8%) | | 10.5 (9%) | |
| 12 g | 38.7 (20%) | | 21.5 (12%) | | 12.5 (10%) | |
| 18 g | 49.6 (25%) | | 83.0 (48%) | | 60.0 (50%) | |

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# Trial Status

- Funded by US National Institutes of Health/National Institute of General Medical Sciences (R01GM103799)
- Led by Alan E. Jones, MD at the University of Mississippi, Department of Emergency Medicine
- Currently enrolling subjects

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# Conclusions

- The goal of an early phase clinical trial is to answer the questions:
  - Should the treatment be further investigated?
  - How should any further trial(s) be designed, conducted, and analyzed?
- The design of an early phase trial must be tailored to allow for
  - Greater uncertainty regarding safety and efficacy
  - Greater uncertainty regarding how best to administer the treatment and measure the effect
  - The need to address multiple trial goals

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