Including Older Adults in Research:

Challenges and Strategies for Recruitment

Outline

- Who are considered 'older adults'?

- Importance of including older adults

- Barriers to inclusion in research

- Inclusion in research: Addressing the barriers

- Additional resources

Who are considered older adults?

- Individuals aged 65 and over are considered "older adults", with ages in this group ranging from 65 to 100+ years old

- There are more Americans today age 65 and older than any other time in history (~49 million)[1]

- And these numbers are expected to grow, being one of the fastest growing age groups[2]

1. National Institute on Aging: Strategic Directions for Research
2. U.S. Census Bureau: Older Population and Aging

Why is it important to include older adults?

- Our bodies react differently as we age. To fully understand how drugs, medical devices, therapies, surgical procedures, and tests work, it is important to include all age groups

- Many diseases are common in older people, yet little research has been done in older ages

- Many diseases are distinctly different in older adults, yet haven't been studied in these age groups

- Clinicians caring for older adults, particularly those from diverse populations, have little evidence to guide their care

- Older adult inclusion in research is ensured through the NIH Inclusion Across the Lifespan Policy[1], which aims to increase the participation of older adults in research so that the knowledge gained from research is applicable to all those affected by the disease/condition

1. NIH: Inclusion Across the Lifespan policy

Known barriers to including older adults in research:

- Rigid protocol eligibility criteria
  - Limited age range
  - Comorbidities and medications excluded
  - Certain mobility level required

- Time
  - Length of study, consent process, timing and frequency of study visits, etc.

- Ability or mobility level of participant

- Cognitive status of participant (based on age or disease/condition)

- Need for study adaptability

- Accessibility of study site
  - Location, ramps, elevators, etc.

- Transportation concerns

- Schedule and availability of caregiver (if applicable)

Inclusion in research: Addressing the barriers

There are many measures or practices study teams can put into place to address the barriers and include older adults in their research studies.

Evaluate and redesign the study protocol if needed or able to
- Ensure the inclusion age range is reflective of the disease demographics
- Adapt study procedures to match participant's diverse ability levels
- Structure measurement tools so they are readable to all vision levels (e.g. font type or size in surveys)
- Lengthen study timelines to account for the extra time needed for recruiting, consenting, and study visits
- Ensure eligibility exclusions (e.g. comorbidities, medications, mobility, etc.) are based on scientific necessity and relevant to the study and its outcomes

Build flexibility and adaptability into your study
- Expand the window of time around study visits to accommodate for participant's and/or their caregiver's schedules
- Align study visits with standard of care visits to minimize trips to and time at the study site
- Ensure the site is accessible and appropriate for this population, that the location is convenient to get to and that there are ramps and elevators to accommodate wheelchairs, walkers, etc. And if not, take measures to address these needs
- Based on the disease or age, build cognitive assessment checks into the consent process to ensure the participant has the capacity to comprehend the study and give informed consent
- Consent family member/caregiver (proxy) so can include them in study communication and so that the participant can remain in the study if they lose capacity during it

Plan for appropriate resources
- Think about the time, staff, resources and finances you will need to recruit older adults into your study
- Include these items in your study budget, planning and timelines

Overcome transportation issues
- Consider using car services, vouchers for rideshares or taxis, or having home visits to meet transportation needs
- Transportation services, like [Uber Health](#) and [Lyft Business for Healthcare](#), have been launched to expedite patient transportation
- Additionally, the FDA considers associated costs and reimbursement for travel to and from the clinical trial site to be acceptable and not undue influence[1]

Recruitment and retention
- Use multiple recruitment methods
  - This includes digital recruitment. It's often assumed older adults don't use technology, when research shows over 50% of this age group own smartphones and tablets and use social media[2]
- Put retention methods in place to keep subjects informed and engaged. Ideas include reminder phone calls about upcoming study visits, sending regular newsletters, sharing study results, and sending greeting cards at birthdays and other important dates
- Ensure your recruitment materials are sensitive to and inclusive of older adult populations, adapting materials to meet the needs of your participants
- Meet with [OCTRI's Recruitment and Special Populations](#) team for a complimentary recruitment consult

1. FDA: [Payment and Reimbursement to Research Subjects](#)
2. Pew Research: [Age and Technology Use](#)

Recruitment Materials

It's important recruitment materials are sensitive to and inclusive of older adult populations. Take into consideration what images and words are being used and how the material is being presented.

Images

When choosing images for recruitment materials, it is important to represent the full spectrum of age, gender, race, ethnicity, body shape, ability, mobility, etc. And that your images are inclusive and representative of the populations you are trying to recruit.

Words

Word choice and writing style are important as it impacts a participant's ability to understand the recruitment materials and decide to enroll into a study. When writing materials, it's important to consider:

- Words are written in plain, simple language with no medical or research jargon

- Writing is at a 6th grade reading level

- Clear and concise writing (i.e. less words), conveying messages clearly and limiting the amount of information participants have to consume at once

- Using words that are culturally, spiritually or otherwise competent

- Documents are translated to the participant's primary or preferred language(s)

- Choosing a large enough font size, so that material is readable by all age and vision levels

- A tone to the messaging that is positive and respectful

Layout and formatting

Ensure the overall layout and design of recruitment materials are clean and organized, making them appealing, readable, and understandable to the intended audience. Think about the use of images, the amount of words on the page, how the page is organized, font style and size, and use of color. By having well created, understandable, person-centered recruitment materials, teams are in a better position to reach and connect with their desired participant group.

Additional Resources

National Institute on Aging
https://www.nia.nih.gov/

NCATS: Inclusion of Older Adults into Clinical and Translational Research Toolkit
https://clic-ctsa.org/education/kits/presentation-materials-library-inclusion-older-adults-clinical-and-translational

NIA: Recruiting Older Adults into Research (ROAR) Toolkit
https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/recruiting-older-adults-research-roar-toolkit

NIA: Communicating with Older Adults for Healthcare Professionals
https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/topics/healthcare-professionals-information

NIA: Alzheimer's & Dementia Outreach, Recruitment & Engagement Resources (ADORE) Toolkit
https://www.nia.nih.gov/research/alzheimers-dementia-outreach-recruitment-engagement-resources

CDC Healthy Aging Program
https://www.cdc.gov/aging/about/index.htm

OHSU Healthy Aging Alliance
https://www.ohsu.edu/healthy-aging-alliance

For more information, additional resources, and to request a recruitment consultation, please visit our website
or email us at octrirecruitment@ohsu.edu