



What Clinical Trial Costs Do Medicare and Medicaid Cover?

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Laura Levaas:

So, aside from the myth, I came into this thinking, "I'm on Medicaid; I probably can't get into a clinical trial when and if I get to that point." And then also, "If I am, it's probably cost prohibitive because I'm on a fixed income." So, is participating in a clinical trial expensive or cost prohibitive if you're on Medicare or Medicaid like I thought? I mean, I know Mark touched on some of the issues, but what would you say? How would you answer that?

Jeanne Regnante:

So, for low-income patients, the cost of routine care and logistic support needed during a clinical trial is certainly a barrier to participation. And Mark pointed out some of these costs. But specifically, in patients in rural communities, remote communities, aging population, children, patients with cognitive disabilities or physical disabilities. These are the same patients who have low access to care in general.

And covering the cost for routine care in a clinical trial and also the logistic support is a clear barrier to participation. So, there are clear barriers there, travel, housing, parking, paying for food, on having access to clinical trials not only for routine care costs like Mark alluded to but also logistical support being included in the clinical trials. So, all of those things are barriers.

Laura Levaas:

And would you say that seniors are also part of this underserved population?

Jeanne Regnante:

Absolutely, especially seniors that live alone, that are in remote rural areas in the United States. And remember, that's 20 percent of the population, aging population, in those areas. So, clearly, we need to do better to engage those patients in care and also clinical trials.

Laura Levaas:

So, is it possible for us to draw any conclusions about how many people are on Medicare or Medicaid right now in the US? I did a little bit of internet sleuthing mainly through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, and it seems like there – the numbers that I came up with were pretty high, and it's almost like 40 percent of the population is on Medicare or Medicaid. And so, has it...

Jeanne Regnante:

...that's absolutely true. Look at by the numbers, there is 329 million people living in the United States, and that's according to the last census, which is a hot topic these days. There is 60 million people on Medicare, beneficiaries, and about 66 million people Medicaid. So, together, that represents about 40 percent of the population. And we have to remember kids. So, there are 7 million patients on CHIP, which is part of the Medicaid program. So, if you include percentage of people on Medicaid plus kids on CHIP, that's 22 percent of the population.

Laura Levaas:

So, then circling it back around to clinical trial participation, how can we connect the dots here?

Jeanne Regnante:

So, I think one of the main issues is clinical trial sponsors and the clinical trial operations folks in the sites working together to do a better job of reaching out to patients, ensuring that everybody is asked to participate, and not just selecting the ones who people think can participate but asking everybody to participate and understanding the eligibility of all patients and working together to help to cover their costs to keep them in chart.

Laura Levaas:

Got it. Mark, I'm gonna pull you back into the conversation here for a minute. Can you touch briefly on what's happening in the news right now around Medicare and Medicaid that could potentially impact clinical trials? Or maybe, Jeanne, you can speak better to that.

Jeanne Regnante:

I'll let Mark take that one.

Mark Fleury:

Certainly, so, Medicaid traditionally has been a program that has served primarily children in many states, children and pregnant women. Starting close to 10 years ago with the passing of the Affordable Care Act, states had the ability to expand Medicaid eligibility beyond those kids and pregnant women. And now we see many states who have expanded the roles of Medicaid recipients to healthy adults who just happen to be lower income.

And so, what that really has changed is the number of people obtaining their insurance through Medicaid. Obviously, there has been a lot of—it's a state-by-state decision whether or not Medicaid is expanded. The Affordable Care Act as a whole is hanging in the balance in a court case, and there's obviously been a lot of discussion about whether it should continue or not. So, certainly, the number of people who are supported through Medicaid is a dynamic number, and that certainly is subject to changing policies that are still under active discussion.

I will say that Medicare, again, the coverage for routine care costs in clinical trials for Medicare, long-standing policy since 2000 that has been relatively stable. And I would expect that to continue unchanged.

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