Research for Osteoporosis

by BRENDA VANTA

Getting Involved in Research for Osteoporosis

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is the largest hospital in the word focused on scientific study, and an agency of the US Public Health Services. If you wish to participate in a study, you will receive high quality medical care and, while receiving said care, you'll also participating in the furtherance of scientific knowledge.

The center selects participants based on their medical information and histories. Most patients are accepted though referrals, though self-referrals are also accepted (once you've spoken to a health professional from the research team). Some participants will receive new treatments, which can potentially help you and many other OP sufferers. The doctors will closely monitor your response to the new drug or treatment.

As a new participant in a study, you are admitted to the hospital under the protocol of a care and observation plan. This program serves as a guide for doctors to better understand Osteoporosis and new therapies.

Before you can participate in the study, a nurse or doctor will explain the protocol in detail. At this point you can ask any questions you may have before signing the consent form. The amount of time spent at the clinic and the number of visits to the doctor for investigations depends on the drug or investigation that is being evaluated. Some studies may be conducted over a few weeks, while in other cases it may take more than a year. All relevant details will be included in the consent form.

Current Research

Aside from new drugs and therapies for OP, there is special interest in improving the diagnostic tool for OP.

In the future, we may see DEXA scans (the current gold standard test for OP) replaced with CT scans or other tests. Although DEXA is accurate, scientists have found that they have several limitations. For example, many patients with normal bone density on DEXA scans still have fractures, and many people who are diagnosed with OP based on DEXA scans don't get fractures. This is because DEXA tests tell doctors how much bone loss is apparent, but very little about its structure. Think about the human skeleton like a bridge made of metal; you can see two bridges with the same amount of metal, but one is appears more sturdy and solid because if the way it was built. Human bones are similar.

Researchers are pointing out that CT scans and peripheral scanners may be more accurate and they may replace DEXA scans in the future. This way, doctors will be able to predict the risk of fracture more accurately, and plan treatment accordingly.

Contact Information

If you would like to learn more general information about research and the clinical center, call 301-496-3141 or 301-496-3315/6. If you are interested in participating in a study, or ready to volunteer, call the Office of Patient

Recruitment at 1-800-411-1222 and arrange an appointment.