Including Older Adults in Research:

Challenges and Strategies for Recruitment

Who are considered "older adults"?

- Individuals aged 65 and older are considered "older adults"
  - This group of individuals can range from 65 to over 100 years old

- "Older adults" is one of the fastest growing age groups
  - There are an estimated 47.8 million Americans ages 65 and older, that is 14.9% of the total population
  - This age group grew by 1.6 million people from the year before
  - It is estimated this number will be 72 million by 2030 and 98.2 million by 2060
  - People in this age group will comprise nearly 1 in 4 U.S. residents

- As our population ages, it becomes increasingly important to include the older age ranges in research, especially those 80 to 100+ years old

*NIH (2018). "Aging Well in the 21st Century."
*U.S. Census Bureau (2016). "The Older Population in the U.S."

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

What are some challenges to including older adults?

- Study inclusion and exclusion criteria:
    - Limited age range (ex. "Individuals aged 18-55 years old")
    - Comorbidities excluded
    - Certain mobility level required

- Recruitment and retention methods

- Transportation concerns

- Need for study adaptability

So, how do we overcome these challenges?

Evaluate and redesign the study protocol if needed or able to
- Is the inclusion age range reflective of the disease demographics?
- Can certain study procedures be adapted to match participant's diverse ability levels?
- Are measurement tools structured in a way that are readable (ex. font type or size in surveys)?
- Is there any part of the study that would exclude older adults and not for ethical or scientific reasons?

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

Use multiple recruitment methods
- Email campaigns
- Postings on social media
- Community newsletters
- Electronic Health Records (EHR)
- Printed materials (ex. flyers) in healthcare spaces (ex. waiting rooms)
- Physician referrals
- Disease associations (ex. American Cancer Society, Alzheimer's Association)
- Community outreach – engage with local gyms, community centers, coffee shops/meal sites, places of worship, independent living and retirement communities
- Be visible in the community - trust matters! Attend local festivals, health fairs, give talks at senior centers
- Partner with community agencies like Area Agencies on Aging

Put retention methods in place
- Reminder phone call or postcard about upcoming study visits
- 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
- Send regular newsletters, share study results, send greeting cards, to keep subjects informed and engaged

Overcome transportation issues
- Consider using car services, vouchers for rideshares or taxis, or having home visits to meet transportation needs
- New services, like Uber Health and Lyft Concierge, have been launched to expedite patient transportation
- According to the FDA, "reimbursement for travel expenses (airfare, parking, lodging, etc) not considered 'undue influence' and 'generally accepted'"

Helpful Tips

Tip #1:
Allow plenty of time-recruiting older adults can be a slow process

Tip #2:
Adapt recruitment materials to the right font color, type, size, etc. to make it reader friendly

Tip #3:
When creating the study budget, don't forget to include transportation costs and other extra study needs

Tip #4:
Engage experts to assist in study design

Where can I find more information on including older adults in research?

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

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

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

Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI)
https://www.pcori.org/research-in-action/bringing-older-adults-voices-research

OHSU C. Rex and Ruth H. Layton Aging & Alzheimer's Disease Center
https://www.ohsu.edu/xd/health/services/brain/getting-treatment/diagnosis/alzheimers-aging-dementia/research/index.cfm

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

Oregon Center for Aging & Technology (ORCATECH)
https://www.ohsu.edu/xd/research/centers-institutes/orcatech/

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

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