COMMUNICATING RISKS IN THE CONSENT DOCUMENT

Ben Mooso
Outline

• What does the evidence show?

• What is our best practice?
The Evidence – Words

• “Common”, “Occasionally”, “Rarely”
  • Words have different meaning from person to person
  • Words have different meaning based on severity of what they describe
• Vaguely communicate level of risk
• May lead to poor understanding of actual level of risk
• Can be suggestive leading to undue influence
The Evidence – Numbers

• We have an innate understanding of simple frequencies
  • E.g. 1 in 10, 1 in 100, 1 in 1000

• Converting percentages to frequencies is more complicated
  • What’s the denominator?

• Pitfalls of simple frequencies
  • We tend to look at only the numerator
  • Larger denominators (with the same numerator) aren’t interpreted as less risk
The Evidence – Decision Making

• We generally feel that word descriptors are ambiguous
• We favor less ambiguity when deciding on risks
• We bring our own meaning to words describing risk
• We often ascribe higher risk to words than corresponding frequencies
  • E.g. Common vs. 1 in 10, Rare vs. less than 1 in 100
• We make more informed decisions when presented with numerical information
Best Practices – When Risk Frequency is Known

• Words alone should not be used
• Words should be used in conjunction with simple frequencies
• All frequencies in a document to describe risk should have the same denominator

Example:
• Common (greater than 10 in 100)
• Uncommon (1 in 100 to 10 in 100)
• Rare (less than 1 in 100)
Best Practices – When Risk Frequency is Unknown

• If estimates are provided, use frequencies as previously described

• If truly unknown frequency, describe that the frequency of the risks are unknown up front
QUESTIONS?