

COMMUNICATING RISKS IN THE CONSENT DOCUMENT

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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?