



Advancing Health with Clinical Studies

Why Placebos and Controls?

A placebo is a harmless medication that mimics a medication but has no effect on a patient. It is often used in “blind” studies where the patient/client and often the treating veterinarian do not know if a patient is receiving the medicated treatment or the placebo. This provides a comparison between patients receiving a treatment and those not treated but keeping everything else the same. For example, if 100 patients are in a study, 50 may randomly receive the treatment and the others the placebo. All patients receive the same laboratory tests, exams, etc. At the end of the study, the patients’ response or lack of response to treatment are compared. Testing is done to check for effects caused by the medicated treatment compared to patients receiving the placebo.

A “blind” study takes into account the “placebo effect” where owners note improvements just because the patient is receiving a “medication” or extra care due to being in a study. Clients expect results, so observe improvement even when the pet is not receiving any new treatment.

Patients used as “controls” may receive a placebo treatment or a standard treatment. Control patients may be a healthy population of a certain breed to determine the likelihood of developing a certain condition. They may also be patients affected by a disease and randomly receive a placebo instead of a medicated treatment. Both sets of patients are very important to help determine the effectiveness of treatment while advancing knowledge of medical conditions.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a clinical study?

Clinical studies involve researching new medications, treatments, tests or devices to determine if they improve patients’ health and well-being. Clinical studies may be called clinical trials or clinical research.

2. How can my pet participate?

All studies have specific criteria regarding species of animal, condition to be treated, current medications, etc. Information on the requirements for each study are included on our website. Check back often for new studies to open. Clinical studies are always voluntary. No animals are entered into a study without the full understanding and permission of the client.

3. What are the benefits or risks?

Patients participating in a study may receive treatments not available to the general population. A pet may or may not benefit from this, however, all studies advance scientific knowledge. New drugs and protocols may have side effects and studies may require more frequent visits to the UW Veterinary Care for recheck exams and laboratory tests. All studies are reviewed and require approval by the School of Veterinary Medicine’s Animal Care and Use Committee to assure minimal risk to the patient.

4. What does it cost?

The cost of participation varies with the individual study. Many studies are funded by grants that cover part or all of the treatment costs. All fees are discussed prior to a patient entering a study.

For information on all clinical studies, please visit: uwveterinarycare.wisc.edu/clinical_studies