

New smartphone app makes it easy to find—and enroll in—clinical trials

June 1 2016, by Ellen Goldbaum



The purpose of the app Elkin developed is to try to overcome some of the bottlenecks in clinical trial recruitment that prevent medical advances from reaching the patients who need them. Credit: Douglas Levere, University at Buffalo

It takes an astounding 17 years, on average, for laboratory breakthroughs

to reach patients. A big part of the delay is the time it takes to recruit patients into clinical trials to test new treatments or devices: only 5 to 10 percent of eligible adults enroll in these trials and some studies have found that only 5 percent of patients who showed initial interest in a clinical trial will complete it.

These inefficiencies pose tremendous barriers to getting life-saving treatments and devices onto the market. At the same time, great promise for boosting recruitment lies in the ubiquity of cell phones and recent findings showing that text messaging is far more effective at reaching [patients](#) than landlines.

Now, a University at Buffalo researcher funded by the university's Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) has developed a smartphone [app](#) designed to boost recruitment by taking advantage of these technologies.

"A key goal of the CTSA grant is to improve patient access to medical innovations available in our region through clinical trials," said Peter Elkin, MD, professor and chair of the Department of Biomedical Informatics in the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at UB and professor in the Department of Medicine. "We've developed a cell phone app that allows patients to quickly and easily evaluate clinical trials, the time commitment involved and the location of the study nearest their home."

A downloadable photo is [here](#).

A second app under development will allow clinicians to more easily recruit patients into their trials by allowing them to search for local trials that meet their patients' needs. One touch will refer them to the appropriate study coordinator.

Elkin, who sees patients at UBMD Internal Medicine, will describe the new app June 2 at the 2016 Informational Technology in Academic Medicine conference in Toronto, sponsored by the Association of American Medical Colleges.

The [smartphone app](#) is based on a participant driven science system, PartSci, which is integrated with UB's local clinical trial management system. PartSci will access information on registered clinical trials in the region and send them to a database, with data about the trials expressed using [natural language processing](#) technology developed by Elkin and his colleagues at UB.

Patients can search for studies by typing in the name of their disorder or the kind of clinical trial they're interested in. "When patients find a study that interests them, they just push a button and their contact information is sent to the study coordinator who can contact them to begin recruitment," said Elkin.

Once patients agree to be contacted through the app, they are presented with a message thanking them for being a hero in the effort to improve health care.

"This app has the potential to significantly speed enrollment in [clinical trials](#) and the translation of basic research into new therapies to benefit our patients," said Elkin. "By allowing patients to essentially self-recruit, this app empowers individuals to more actively participate in improving their health and the health of their communities."

Provided by University at Buffalo

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