

# Study: Peer messages improve chances of clinical trial participation

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Messages from peers improved participants' attitudes toward clinical trials in a recent study. Credit: Shutterstock

A recent study, "Effects of Communication Source and Racial Representation in Clinical Trial Recruitment Fliers," published in *Health Communication*, found that messages from peers improved participants' attitudes toward clinical trials and increased the intentions to participate in future trials.

The study was conducted by Ciera Elaine Kirkpatrick, assistant professor in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's College of Journalism and Mass Communications, Sungkyoung Lee, associate professor at the University of Missouri's School of Journalism, and Namyoun Lee, assistant professor at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke.

In the study, 300 participants completed an online experiment in which they responded to clinical trial recruitment advertisements. The ads featured messages from individuals from varying races as well as messages from both peers who had previously participated in [clinical trials](#) and medical experts.

The study found that ads featuring peers who previously participated in clinical trials were more effective than ads featuring medical professionals. Participants indicated that they found peer ads more relevant and credible. They also led to improved attitudes toward clinical trials and increased intentions to participate in future clinical trials. Additionally, the study found that messages from racially mismatched peers were more effective than racially matched [peers](#) at increasing relevance perceptions.

This trend did not hold true for ads featuring medical professionals. White participants reported that ads featuring racially matched doctors (i.e., white) were more effective, while black participants reported that ads featuring racially mismatched doctors (i.e., white doctors) were more effective.

Clinical trials are important to the development of new medications and treatments, but enrolling adequate numbers of participants has been a challenge for researchers. As biological characteristics such as one's race, gender and age can affect their responses to diseases and treatment, it's especially important that clinical trials are able to recruit participants of varying demographics.

As peer messages had such significant positive effects, the study recommends that [messages](#) aimed at increasing clinical trial participation incorporate the use of a peer source who can provide their perspective and experience from previous clinical trial participation. Peer sources who have participated in [trials](#) themselves can be persuasive to other potential participants because they are a source of information that is similar to the potential participant, and their [personal experience](#) may make individuals more comfortable with clinical trial participation.

**More information:** Sungkyoung Lee et al, Effects of Communication Source and Racial

Representation in Clinical Trial Recruitment Flyers,  
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