

WILLINGNESS OF MEDICAL STUDENTS TO BE SUBJECTS IN VACCINE TRIALS

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Background: Field trials of new vaccines are essential to enhance generalizable knowledge and offer potential novel solutions for the prevention and control of communicable diseases. Thus far, evidence regarding medical students' attitudes as participants in vaccine trials is scarce. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the interest of medical students towards participation as volunteer subjects in vaccine trials.

Methods: Medical students in years 4, 5 and 6 (clinical training) at the University of Belgrade participated in a cross-sectional study. Data collection using a pen-and-paper questionnaire was carried out from October to December 2023. Students were asked about demographic characteristics, health status, previous volunteering experience and blood donation and willingness to participate in vaccine trials graded on a Likert-type scale: 1-never, 2-probably not (negative responses), 3-unsure/undecided, 4-probably yes and 5-surely yes (positive responses). Adjusted linear regression and logistic regression were used to analyze data.

Results: Out of 297 participants (females 66.7%; average age 24.1 ± 1.7), 21 students (7.1%) responded positively. Most students had negative opinion about participation (166, 56.1%), while others were undecided. The adjusted regression models showed that being younger ($B = -0.07$, 95% confidence interval [CI] -0.13, -0.01; $p = 0.019$), having chronic illnesses (odds ratio [OR] = 4.86, 95CI 1.69-13.96; $p = 0.003$) and having been blood donor before ($B = 0.25$, 95%CI 0.04, 0.046; $p = 0.020$) were independently associated with being willing to participate in vaccine trials as research subjects.

Conclusion: Few students were willing to be volunteer subjects in vaccine trials. Our findings suggest that students who are blood donors and who have chronic illnesses were more willing to participate in vaccine trials as subjects. The promotion of blood donation could help enhance the response of medical students to participate in vaccine trials.

Keywords: medical students, vaccine trials, participants