

Poor Richard on Clinical Research

By Norman M. Goldfarb

Mr. Saunders, thank you for joining me for this interview. As you know, you published annual almanacs for 26 years under the name "Poor Richard." Over the past 250 years, many of your aphorisms have entered the common parlance; for example, "haste makes waste" and "fish and visitors stink after three days." Does that please you?

People who are wrapped up in themselves make small packages. Well done is better than well said.

There is a general belief that "Poor Richard" is, in fact, an alias of Benjamin Franklin, a founding father of the United States of America. Is there any truth to this rumor?

It is wise not to seek a secret and honest not to reveal it.

Your views on clinical research should be especially interesting since, in 1784, King Louis XVI of France appointed you to conduct studies on the use of magnetism to treat various ailments. We now know that these studies are historic because you used placebo controls and literally blindfolded the subjects.

He is the best physician that knows the worthlessness of the most medicines.

In your opinion, what training is best for a clinical investigator?

Experience keeps a dear school, yet fools will learn in no other. Learn of the skillful: He that teaches himself has a fool for his master.

What advice do you have for research sites?

Promises may get thee friends, but nonperformance will turn them into enemies. Keep thy shop and thy shop will keep thee. Think of three things – whence you came, where you are going, and to whom you must account. Hide not your talents, they for use were made; what's a sundial in the shade? Now that I have a sheep and a cow, everybody bids me good-morrow.

Study sponsors often complain about the difficulty of finding good investigators.

'Tis a strange forest that has no rotten wood in it. Be slow in choosing a friend, slower in changing. He that lieth down with dogs shall rise up with fleas.

How should a sponsor maintain good relationships with investigators?

The horse thinks one thing, and he that saddles him another. The goodwill of the governed will be starved if not fed by the good deeds of the governors.

What should the sponsor do when a problem arises at a research site?

'Tis great confidence in a friend to tell him your faults, greater to tell him his. He that won't be counseled can't be helped.

How tolerant should the sponsor be?

The worst wheel of the cart makes the most noise. We are not so sensible of the greatest health as of the least sickness. When the well's dry, we know the worth of water.

What do you think of international trials?

Changing countries or beds cures neither a bad manager nor a fever.

Well, Mr. Saunders, you certainly have a way with words. Do you have any parting words of wisdom for our readers?

You may delay, but time will not. There's more old drunkards than old doctors.

Author

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