

## Celebrating International Clinical Trials Day: Reflections on research and its impact

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Each year on May 20th, we commemorate International Clinical Trials Day—an emblematic date that recalls a pivotal moment in the history of medicine. In 1747, aboard the HMS *Salisbury*, British naval surgeon James Lind conducted what is now considered the first controlled clinical trial in history.<sup>1</sup> By administering different treatments to sailors suffering from scurvy, Lind demonstrated the effectiveness of citrus fruits in combating this devastating disease, thus laying the foundation for modern clinical research and opening a path that has revolutionized medical practice.<sup>2</sup>

This day not only celebrates the tangible advances brought about by clinical trials but also invites reflection on the very essence of scientific research. Beyond transforming knowledge and clinical practice, research has a profound impact on those who engage in it. Individuals actively involved in generating new knowledge experience a transformation that transcends technical and academic domains, developing critical thinking and intellectual curiosity—qualities that are the true engines of scientific progress.

Despite some concerns about its true usefulness,<sup>3</sup> research enhances creativity and problem-solving skills—abilities that are essential in a constantly evolving world. Furthermore, the protection of the rights of research participants incorporates ethical principles that go far beyond

mere regulatory compliance, reflecting a genuine commitment to the respect of human dignity.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the most important—and simultaneously most challenging—aspect of research lies in accepting the principle of uncertainty upon which it is based. The design and execution of any scientific study rests on the premise that we do not yet know the answer to the question we are investigating; otherwise, the study would be unnecessary. This uncertainty requires researchers to embrace intellectual humility, acknowledging the complexity of the phenomena involved and the fact that conclusions are constrained to the specific variables selected and controlled in the study.<sup>5</sup>

This balance between methodological rigor and epistemic modesty is what makes research a dynamic process—always open to new questions, revisions, and improvements. Ultimately, science progresses to the extent that it remains aware of its own limitations and is willing to face the unknown with both rigor and respect.

As we mark this year's International Clinical Trials Day, let us renew our commitment to ethical, rigorous, and reflective research—convinced that only through such an approach can we continue building knowledge that truly transforms lives and strengthens our health systems.

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