Recruitment and retention of participants to clinical trials is critical to the outcome and success of clinical trial research. Clinical trials in nursing research have become more prevalent in the past decade, particularly as more intervention-level studies are implemented (Burns & Grove, 1997). Clinical trials have provided validity to examinations of outcomes of nursing interventions for testing theory-based practice (Tyzenhouse, 1981; Woods, 1990).

Clinical trials in nursing fall into two categories—preventive and therapeutic (Talbot, 1995). Preventive trials examine the efficacy of a specific treatment in reducing risks associated with a disease. Therapeutic trials examine outcomes of specific interventions or treatments, such as symptom relief, risk reduction, or relapse prevention. The most common types of clinical trials are drug studies that test the efficacy of medications.

An advantage of clinical trials is that they establish a relationship between treatment and clinical outcomes. Clinical trials most often require randomization, which involves placement of subjects in groups on a random basis, giving every subject an equal chance of being assigned and eliminating selection bias (Polit & Hungler, 1999). This method helps reduce threats to internal and external validity (Talbot, 1995).

Disadvantages of clinical trials include expense and ethical considerations related to treatments for which risks have not yet been documented (Talbot).

A number of factors may affect participation in clinical trials. Pilot studies are critical and usually required prior to the implementation of large clinical trials. The pilot study allows...