

Group hopes it can educate the public on clinical research

- Article by: [JANET MOORE](#) , Star Tribune
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Rick Wallach

After Rick Wallach enrolled in a clinical study for a diabetes drug eight years ago, he admits he felt a pang of misgiving.

"What are they going to do to me?" the 63-year-old retired marketing consultant thought.

But the Plymouth resident says he's motivated to participate in studies because his involvement as a test subject could help others. Plus, Wallach said, the compensation test subjects receive helps pay some bills, and the medical care he has received was "top-notch."

Fifteen years after being diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, Wallach has enrolled in three clinical studies.

His story is the kind of tale that the newly launched Minnesota Clinical Research Alliance (MCRA) hopes to publicize. The nascent group, consisting of 11 locally based contract-research organizations and several large medical practices, wants to lobby on behalf of the state's research community and educate the public on how these studies work.

Few details on future plans were shared at a news conference Thursday.

Last year, Minnesota was home to 1,742 active clinical trials, roughly 11 percent of the 15,134 studies ongoing in the United States, according to Archstone Consulting.

The state has long been a research hub due to the strong presence of medical technology companies, including the world's largest, Fridley-based Medtronic Inc., as well as the University of Minnesota.

Dr. Michael Gonzalez-Campoy of the Minnesota Center for Obesity, Metabolism and Endocrinology stressed the importance of clinical research in unearthing new and potentially lifesaving drugs and treatments. He added that bolstering the clinical research community in the state could provide a boost to the state's economy.

"When I first heard about this group, I thought, 'How great is this?'" said Sarah Walbert, the medical device specialist for the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development.

MCRA will have a presence at the BIO International Convention in Washington, D.C., next week, a behemoth annual gathering of 15,000 leaders in the biotechnology field.

MCRA officials said that it is the first organization of its kind in the United States. Recently, MCRA obtained an undisclosed amount of start-up funding from PhRMA, the drug industry's lobbying group.

The group said it hopes to become self-sustaining over the next year through a combination of paid sponsorships and partner dues.

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