

Clinical trial firms land new partnerships

Volunteers flock to studies for free care and medicine

BY ANGELA GONZALES
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An increasing number of Valley residents are opting to participate in medical clinical trials for cash and free health care — good news for Jason and Suzanne Bonanza, who just landed some major research studies.

The husband-and-wife team forged partnerships with Southwest Behavioral Health Services to conduct trials for psychiatric medications, and with Barnet Dulaney Perkins Eye Center to test eye medications.

The couple owns two companies that together are conducting nearly 50 studies on treatments and medications for pharmaceutical companies nationwide. They have access to a patient base of more than 400,000 potential study subjects in the Valley through a partnership with Phoenix-based Integrated Medical Services.

The Bonanzas are seeing more people signing up to participate in clinical trials because they can receive free medical services and medicine. Study participants also get paid to be part of these trials, ranging from \$25 for an outpatient visit to \$5,000 for overnight studies that span 17 nights.

Jason Bonanza is CEO of Dedicated Phase I, which conducts phase one clinical trials, in which drugs are tested on people for the first time. His wife is CEO of Dedicated Clinical Research, which conducts phase two through four trials after drugs have passed rigorous phase one testing.

Clinical trials are part of the process all drugs must go through before receiving U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval.

Bob Bohanske, chief of clinical services and clinical training for Southwest Behav-



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Marleny Munoz, screening manager for Dedicated Phase I, prepares to measure the blood-sugar levels of diabetic patients in a clinical study at the company's Phoenix facility.

ioral Health, said his agency is sending patients to DCR for a chance to try new treatments when others have failed.

"It's an interesting and unique collaboration," Bohanske said. "It's probably the first in Arizona. We come across a good number of folks in which traditional clinical approaches and current available medications don't work, or patients continue to suffer with things that impact their ability to enjoy their families, participate in their



J. Bonanza

work or do activities of daily living."

Jason Bonanza said he will become involved in this new partnership, helping to develop over night facilities with a lock-down unit.

He also is partnering with another phase one center in Florida to begin conducting studies for renal disease, which affects the kidneys. He said

TRIALS: Dedicated Clinical Research opening fourth Valley office this week

renal studies are lucrative, and very few phase one centers in the U.S. are set up to do them.

Suzanne Bonanza said pharmaceutical companies are desperate to get these trials done at a time when plenty of people are willing to participate.



S. Bonanza

“We’ve seen a huge increase in the participants who are interested in finding out if they’re going to qualify for a study,” she said. “It definitely has to do with the economy. Patients need medication, and they can’t afford to pay for it. They can get it free in a clinical study. That’s what they’re doing. It’s not so much for the money; it’s more for the free health care.”

For example, 104 people were screened for DCR’s recently completed hypertension study. In the past, only 20 people might



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This lock box contains drugs to be taken by clinical trial participants at Dedicated Phase I in Phoenix, where 100 patients are helping test experimental medications.

be screened for such a trial.

“With the hypertension study, they got free hypertension medication, we sent them home with a blood pressure cuff, they got

free blood work, free EKGs, visits with doctors — we saw them weekly,” she said.

While the couple markets their two companies as a package unit, they are separate. After a drug passes the first phase of human clinical trials at Dedicated Phase I, it can be studied at the subsequent levels at DCR.

“Our companies are not officially married,” said Jason Bonanza. “We’re working on that. We think it makes sense to put them together.”

DCR has about 200 active patients in clinical trials, while Dedicated Phase I, which employs 36 people, has about 100.

DCR has three offices in IMS medical buildings in Avondale, Goodyear and Litchfield Park, and is opening a fourth this week at John C. Lincoln North Hospital in Phoenix. It has 13 employees and plans to hire six more in the next six months, including patient recruiters and coordinators who oversee clinical studies.

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