

Drug industry gauges economic impact of R&D in state

By [Guy Boulton](#) of the Journal Sentinel
June 13, 2012

Drug companies have sponsored more than 2,000 clinical trials in Wisconsin since 1999, according to a report released Wednesday by Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, or Phrma, the industry's main trade group.

That doesn't include clinical trials sponsored by the National Institutes of Health or clinical trials for medical devices.

The new report is one in a series of state reports by Phrma to tout the industry's economic impact and to recruit people for clinical trials.

Biopharmaceutical companies invested \$114.2 million in research and development in Wisconsin in 2008, according to Phrma. And 1,311 clinical trials were taking place in the state in 2010.

The trials are overseen by doctors and scientists not just at the state's two medical school but also at health systems and clinics. For example:

Aurora Health Care, the state's largest health system, is participating in an estimated 600 research trials for drugs and medical devices.

The Medical College of Wisconsin, which had a research budget of \$161 million, including \$92.9 million in funding from the National Institutes of Health, in the fiscal year ended June 30, 2011, including Froedtert Hospital, Zablocki VA Medical Center and Children's Hospital of Wisconsin are participating in approximately 450 active clinical trials.

Marshfield Clinic Research Foundation, which has an annual research budget of about \$25 million, is participating in about 400 clinical trials, roughly half of them funded by the National Institutes of Health.

The trials can range in size from two people to hundreds of people, said Kristin Martinez, clinical research center administrator at the Marshfield Clinic Research Foundation. Recruiting patients is a challenge.

The trade group estimates that 190 clinical trials for chronic diseases in Wisconsin sponsored by pharmaceutical companies still are recruiting patients.

One obstacle is only a small percentage of drugs in clinical trials are proven to be effective.

Roughly one in five drugs in Phase III trials - the final phase in which a drug's effectiveness is determined - makes it to market, according to Phrma.

In addition, those that do may not be any more effective than existing drugs. That's because pharmaceutical companies generally only have to prove that the drug is safe and effective - not more effective than existing drugs - to win regulatory approval.

But Jeff Trewhitt, a spokesman for Phrma, said "Some patients might benefit - and I stress the word 'might.' "

Many patients also want to help advance science.

"Obviously society benefits from patients' participating in trials," said Steven Yale, director of clinical research at Marshfield Clinic Research Foundation.

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