

Rewards (such as vouchers) for children participating in research may be welcomed as an appropriate way of saying 'thank you', or criticised as a form of undue incentive (to either child or parent). What forms of compensation/reward/expression of gratitude for research involvement do you think acceptable, and why?

As we discussed on the telephone, my main comment is to pose a question to your question, as the rules/law is very different in North America to the EU where currently no incentive of any kind is allowed for children participating in clinical trials.

Clearly this is a very important issue for politicians and the public to debate, and not one for researchers to decide alone, although one would hope for an informed, educated discussion rather than a media frenzy that completely misses the points.

Firstly, whatever is put in place, it is important for children to be protected from manipulation, increased risk or unnecessary harm due to the incentive to adults.

However, no research in children involving new drugs or invasive procedures should take place unless there is equipoise, that is to say we do not know the outcome of the research, and that the research may benefit future children with the condition being researched (in the form of treatment or prevention).

If equipoise exists, and we do not know whether treatment A is better than treatment B or vice versa, then **if** it is acceptable for adults to receive reward for their inconvenience/time then it could be argued that (assuming appropriate safeguards) it is also acceptable for children to do so, given that their participation in either arm of the study is considered unknown and equally likely to be of benefit (or risk). Some could go further and argue that it is discriminatory to young people not to be allowed to be offered similar incentives to adults in certain situations.

Of course it is also vital to assess studies on a case by case basis, as it is important to ensure that adults do not simply give consent for children to participate in trials for simple financial gain without any understanding of the risks, but it might make sense to allow the independent ethics committees to make case by case judgements on individual studies where otherwise recruitment might be difficult not because of the risks involved but simply because of the inconvenience.