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Preface

Rational decisions at all levels in health care—from Federal Government policymaking to the treatment of a single patient by a physician—require sound information. Randomized clinical trials (RCTS), a family of clinical experimental designs, provide the highest quality of evidence for the efficacy and safety of medical technologies.

The Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) has a longstanding interest in the tools of medical technology assessment and decisionmaking. Previous OTA reports focusing on the information necessary and available for these activities have discussed the role of RCTS in particular. RCTS fill an obvious need for information yet their impact in health care has remained largely undocumented. This background paper was initiated by OTA to bring together the literature and current views about the actual and potential role of RCTS in decisionmaking about medical technologies.

OTA background papers are prepared by OTA staff and drafts are reviewed by interested individuals and organizations. This paper was written by Hellen Gelband. Thomas Chalmers and Henry Sacks prepared an annotated bibliography that provided material for chapter 5. The Health Program Advisory Committee reviewed the draft; those individuals acknowledged in appendix B either provided information during the course of the study, reviewed the draft report, or did both.
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