

## Clinical Research Junk Email

By Norman M. Goldfarb

I recently received two unsolicited email messages with the text below [sic]. They caused me to wonder if there are other subject recruiting ads like this floating around the Internet.

### **FDA Registered H-G-H 14 Day Trial**

Studies show that H-G-H absolutely works in almost all capacities for almost anyone.

- The New England Journal of Medicine had this to say about H-G-H
- "THE MOST EFFECTIVE ANTI-OBESITY AGENT EVER DISCOVERED"
- THE BEST IMMUNE SYSTEM ENHANCER EVER FOUND;
- The Physicians Blend H-G-H product is one of only three that are registered with the FDA
- The strongest H-G-H formula available without a prescription!
- You've Heard About it. Here Is Your Chance To Try It Risk Free!
- Try Physician's Blend H-G-H on us for 14 days!

### **Suffer from Hair Loss?**

Our hair loss study has 10 more openings.

Receive free hair restoration + Compensation of \$1200.

What other studies are open? I am glad you asked! Here is what we are currently recruiting for:

- Diabetes – Compensation: \$450
- Hepatitis C - Compensation: \$730
- COPD -Compensation: \$1100-\$1750
- Rosacea - Compensation: \$3500
- Rheumatoid Arthritis - Compensation: \$4350
- Birth Control for Teenagers - Compensation: \$525

About 90% of the roughly 200 billion email messages sent each day are unwanted or deceptive junk (spam).<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) asks consumers to forward unwanted and deceptive email message to spam@uce.gov. In the year ending October 31, 2010, it received copies of 44 million spam messages. It stores the messages in its "Spam Refrigerator" database and, from time to time, uses them to pursue law enforcement actions.

On October 21, 2010, I submitted a request under the Freedom of Information Act for copies of the last 100 messages that included the terms "clinical trial" or "clinical research." The helpful and friendly people at the FTC (seriously) soon sent me the messages, which it had received over the previous three weeks, at the low, low price of \$130. But wait, there's more!

The 100 messages (many of them duplicates) include the following:

- Two subject recruitment messages, both opt-in, and one recruitment message for a canine clinical study, presumably not opt-in
- Forty messages promoting health products or providing news, about half apparently legitimate
- Nineteen messages promoting investments in company stocks or providing investment news, apparently legitimate or in a gray area
- Twenty-four apparently legitimate messages for conferences, books, news, etc.
- Thirteen messages to people employed by organizations with "clinical research" in their name, but not containing messages about clinical research; eleven of these messages were to one organization and probably one person
- One legitimate product inquiry from a potential customer planning to conduct a clinical study

Some of the health-related messages include remarkable text, including the following [sic]:

- As seen on CBS news. As seen on the Today show. See results instantly. 95% of clinical trial users reported dramatic improvement in cellulite reduction. Use promocode SMOOTHSKIN for reduced shipping.
- The Flex Belt literately [sic] flexes your stomach muscles for you so you get a very concentrated work out. Using state of art Electronic Muscle Tonight Technology, it makes it so that anyone can exercise their abs anywhere and anytime and it does all the work for you... In a clinical trial done with The Flex Belt, 100% of the participants received results in flattening, toning and strengthening their stomach.
- ...I sent you this special invitation so you could experience firsthand the amazing results Primal Lean can offer without risk or regret. Take my 10-week Primal Lean challenge. Lose all the fat you want. If it disappoints you, I'll pick up the tab and pay for the whole thing. Your results are guaranteed... A clinical study shows that a formula with fucoxanthin is effective for people too. The trial was finished last year and the study has been submitted for publication. From what I've seen, it looks impressive. In the test group, people taking the formula with fucoxanthin lost an average of 15 pounds in four months. The people in the control group lost just three pounds.
- In this special report, you'll discover new medically proven foods you can use to be PAIN FREE... New medical studies from around the world and clinical research for the National Institutes of Health have documented these incredible results. Now they're included in an astonishing book by Neal Barnard, M.D., who's pioneering this exciting new form of medicine... Dump your diabetes medicines. National Institutes of Health research reveals this new diet is more powerful than oral diabetes drugs...  
...Men's Health has been helping guys lose weight and get in shape for a long time. But now, all the latest cutting-edge science and clinical research has been put to work in one amazing program – the Belly Off Diet!... You can lose as much as 20 pounds in just 4 weeks... You don't have to eat just carrot sticks and salad. On the Belly Off Diet, you can enjoy "guy" food like pizza, burgers, tacos and steak. All the foods are carefully chosen to help you stoke your metabolism to lose weight even FASTER!
- Minerva was supposed to die of stomach cancer. But she drank a tasty herbal tea and lived 21 more years. This tea was discovered by a Canadian nurse from a patient who had used it more than 100 years ago. Many versions are now available at health food stores. But only ONE was developed by an M.D., using the original clinical research... In a medical study, 180 patients suffering from 30 different kinds of

cancer took an extract of a common seed. An astounding 83 percent went into remission and were still cancer-free 16 years later. There were no toxic side effects, either. Many cancer patients think you can get this treatment only in Mexico or Germany, but a handful of doctors in the U.S. CAN legally give it to you or your loved one...

- ...I began to see the connection between lungpower and strength back in the early seventies. Then I discovered the pioneering work of Dr. Dean Ward, who uncovered clinical evidence connecting the loss of lungpower to aging. He even found that lung capacity is the key indicator of how long you'll live. This should have shocked the medical establishment, but his observation fell on deaf ears. To this day, mainstream medicine continues to ignore the vital importance of lungpower... By the time you're 50, you've lost 40% of your breathing capacity!... Twenty years of clinical research all point to the same thing: Loss of lungpower spells bad news for your strength, your heart, your health, your brain. In 1988, the European Society of Cardiology reported that even a moderate decline of lung volume increases your risk of heart disease by 200 percent... A chronic lack of oxygen sets off a dangerous chain reaction. Your mind becomes foggy, your energy dries up. Even the simple act of getting off the couch can leave you breathless and your body becomes helpless to any number of deadly diseases. But it doesn't have to be this way. My system pumps up and repairs your lungs. I've seen 2-pack-a-day smokers turn the tables on decades of lung damage. I've seen frail, 85-year-olds regain their strength and come back to life. And here's the best part: You'll never have to suffer through long, tiresome, workouts ever again... Even worse, aerobic training can actually wrack your body. Do enough, and aerobics will make you sick, tired and old before your time...

Based on the above results, we can conclude the following:

- Bold subject recruiting messages like the ones above are not common, but a much larger sample would be required to determine their prevalence.
- If the sample of 100 messages is representative of the 200 billion spam messages sent in 2010, the seven health-related messages above translate into approximately 32,000 different spam messages (not counting duplicates).
- Some promoters of health products are not concerned about the risk of FTC enforcement actions.
- Stock promoters avoid making obviously fraudulent statements pertaining to clinical research. They also avoid providing meaningful information.
- People send legitimate messages to the FTC. Most, but not all, of these messages are probably unsolicited.
- Not everybody reads incoming messages before sending them to the FTC.

Promoters of health products send unsolicited email messages because they work. Some of the remarkable messages above likely appeal to the weakest members of society. If the FTC receives copies of more spam messages about health products, it may initiate more enforcement actions.<sup>2</sup>

## Reference

1. Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-mail\\_spam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-mail_spam)
2. FTC enforcement cases are listed at <http://www.ftc.gov/os/caselist/index.shtm>. Some involve health products.

**Author**

Norman M. Goldfarb is Managing Director of First Clinical Research LLC, a provider of clinical research best practices information, consulting and training services. Contact him at 1.650.465.0119 or [ngoldfarb@firstclinical.com](mailto:ngoldfarb@firstclinical.com).