

TABLE Trial elements, illustrating the extremes of the explanatory – pragmatic continuum

Element	Explanatory (or efficacy) trial	Pragmatic (or effectiveness or management) trial
the question	Can this Rx <u>work</u> under <u>ideal</u> circumstances?	Does this Rx <u>benefit</u> under <u>usual</u> circumstances?
participant eligibility	Strict: restricted to high-risk, highly-responsive, highly compliant.	Free: everyone with the condition of interest.
experimental intervention	Inflexible, with strict instructions for every element. Both participants and practitioners are usually blind. Cross-overs are prohibited.	Highly flexible, as it would be used in routine health care. Nobody is blind. Cross-overs are permitted.
comparison intervention	Inflexible, with strict instructions (often employs a placebo). Both participants and practitioners are usually blind. Cross-overs are prohibited.	Usual care for this condition in this setting. Nobody is blind. Cross-overs are permitted.
practitioner expertise	Only practitioners and settings with previously documented high expertise.	Full range of practitioners and settings in which a successful intervention would be applied.
participant compliance with interventions	Closely monitored, and may be a prerequisite for study entry. Both prophylactic strategies (to maintain) and “rescue” strategies (to regain) high compliance are used.	Unobtrusive (or no) measurement of compliance. No special strategies to maintain or improve their compliance.
practitioner adherence to protocols	Close monitoring into how well clinicians and centers are adhering to the trial protocol and “manual of procedures,” triggering vigorous interventions whenever deficient.	Unobtrusive (or no) measurement of practitioner adherence. No special strategies to maintain or improve their adherence.
follow-up intensity	Frequent, highly intense, with extensive data collection.	Usual intensity for this condition and setting, or restricted to administrative data bases on mortality and utilization.
primary outcome	A restricted set of events, composite outcomes, or surrogate outcomes, often determined by blinded experts and adjudicators.	A broad set of events of importance to participants, determined in the routine course of health care.
primary analysis	Might try to justify excluding non-compliers or non-responders.	Never deviates from “intention-to-treat” analysis of all participants who entered the trial.