



FOR THE GOOD OF MANKIND?

THE **SHAMEFUL HISTORY** OF HUMAN MEDICAL EXPERIMENTATION

VICKI DRANSKY WITTENSTEIN

CRITICAL ANALYSIS: WHAT DO YOU THINK?

This book has described a wide range of unethical and immoral medical behavior on the part of researchers, doctors and other medical staff, and government officials. Many of the people involved in human medical experimentation over time felt they were doing good by advancing the cause of scientific research and medical technology. In some cases, individuals recognized that their decisions and actions were wrong, illegal, or caused immense suffering. However, they felt strongly that other factors were of higher value and worth the risks and the harm inflicted on fellow human beings. Many of the subjects involved in the experiments participated without knowing the full dangers they were facing. In many cases, they were unknowing subjects who never were asked for or gave their consent.

Working with friends or classmates, review the following scenarios and questions. They are all related to the situations you have read about in this book. Discuss the questions together and write down the answers you came up with. Include disagreements. Wrap up the activity by discussing the process. Was it easy or hard to answer the questions? Did your team generally agree or disagree on answers? Why or why not? How might your experience with this activity be similar to what earlier generations faced? How might it be similar to what researchers and subjects are grappling with in the twenty-first century?

Chapter One

Can we judge doctors who practiced medicine in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries by today's standards of behavior? Some people say no. They think that we are more enlightened today and have different ideas of what is right and wrong. On the other hand, some argue that despite the lack of formal laws, doctors were obligated to follow ethical standards forbidding abusive experiments. What do you think? Does your answer depend on whether the subjects were slaves or other people who had little control over their lives, such as children or those condemned to death? What about patients for whom there was no cure? Do you think that the lack of understanding of medical science during these years justified relaxed ethical standards in experimentation?

Chapter Two

In reading the Nazi doctors' defenses to abusive medical experimentation, how do their justifications for their actions fall short?

Chapter Three

1. In wartime, many people believe human experiments must be performed. How do you decide which risky experiments are justified for national security purposes? When should wartime experiments be kept secret? Should they be aired in public? How can secrecy in the name of national security affect doctors' judgments?
2. Men and women in the armed forces are asked to sacrifice their lives. Do you think this sacrifice should include exposure to risky human medical experimentation? When do troop exercises, like those at the Nevada Test Site, cross the line?

Chapter Four

Why do you think black doctors did not protest the Tuskegee Syphilis Study? How do you think the history of slavery affected the formation and continuation of the study? Why do you think many African Americans in the twenty-first century do not completely trust medical doctors?

Chapter Five

1. Pharmaceutical companies and academic institutions serve a vital purpose in developing new treatments and medical devices. They also fund important research. Financial gain is involved. How can we balance the responsibilities of researchers to conduct safe and ethical studies with their hope for increased financial support and compensation?
2. The principle of justice in the Common Rule requires that research subjects represent a diverse group of people, by sex, race, and ethnicity, and across all economic and education levels. Do you think payment promotes the idea of justice in human research? Can you think of other ways to promote a diverse group of subjects?
3. If providing benefits to subjects in developing countries can avoid exploiting poor people, what benefits would you provide? Some ethicists think it is sufficient that participants receive free medical care while they participate in the study. Others argue that companies should provide the community with the tested medicines, if they prove successful. Can you think of any other ways that sponsoring companies can give back to a community of volunteers?

4. Scientists are collecting DNA and mapping the human genome from thousands of people. The results are displayed on websites and accessed by scientists and other people from around the world. Researchers say that more knowledge will promote faster research and cures. One day, having a map of your genome might help treat you and others for a serious disease. How much information would you want others to know about you? Would you want to know that you had a high risk for a disease that currently did not have a cure?
5. Suppose a researcher learned important information affecting your health from studying a tissue sample collected years ago by your doctor. Do you think the researcher should be required to tell you the information? Do you think other family members should be told, as well?



EXPERIMENT: A child is deliberately infected with the deadly smallpox disease without his parents' informed consent.

RESULT: The world's first vaccine.

EXPERIMENT: A slave woman is forced to undergo more than thirty operations without anesthesia.

RESULT: The beginnings of modern gynecology.

EXPERIMENT: From 1946 to 1953, seventy-four boys are fed oatmeal laced with radioactive iron and calcium.

RESULT: A better understanding of the effects of radioactivity on the human body.

Experimental incidents such as these paved the way for crucial medical discoveries and lifesaving cures and procedures. But they also violated the rights of their subjects, many of whom did not give their consent to the experiments. The subjects suffered excruciating pain and humiliation. Some even died as a result of the procedures. Even in the twenty-first century—despite laws, regulations, and ethical conventions—the tension between medical experimentation and patient rights continues.

How do doctors balance the need to test new medicines and procedures with their ethical and moral duty to protect the rights of human subjects? What price has been paid for medical knowledge? Can we learn from the broken oaths of the past?

Take a harrowing journey through some of history's greatest medical advances—and its most horrifying medical atrocities. You'll read about orphans injected with lethal tuberculosis and concentration camp inmates tortured by Nazi doctors. You'll also learn about radiation experimentation and present-day clinical trials that prove fatal. Through these stories, explore the human suffering that has gone hand in hand with medical advancement.

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