
AIDS AND THE REVIEW OF THE DECLARATION OF HELSINKI »

Prof. Nathan CLUMECK

Saint-Pierre University Hospital, Division of Infectious Diseases
Brussels, Belgium

The AIDS epidemic, where 95% of the people infected with HIV are in developing countries and have no access to therapy is a paradigm of the new ethical dilemma in clinical research.

The issues related to these ethical controversies are :

- . The value of «informed consent » among subjects who are economically vulnerable and without access to information ;
- . the value of research to society or to the community in a setting where basic resources are lacking ;
- . the provision of treatment to research participants and ;
- . the appropriate risk – benefit ratios specially in area of vaccine research.

The world Medical Association (WMA, September 19, 2000) has stated that :
« Medical research is only justified if there is a reasonable likelihood that the populations in which the research is carried out stand to benefit from the results of the research. The protocol presented to the ethical review committee must include a realistic plan to deliver those treatments identified through such research to the populations from which the subjects have been drawn ».

However many scientists and medical practitioners are essentially pragmatic and feel that these principles are illogical and impractical. Nevertheless in the debate between a universal versus a utilitarian ethic it must be emphasized that the only way to promote health and goodness is to condemn the exploitation of poor populations and to refuse to apply double standards of treatment. The utilitarian ethic weakens the rights of the subject and, refutes the arguments that patients in developing countries are entitled to receive the best proven therapy.

Acceptance that «scientific interest » is the main motor of clinical research implies a cynical acceptance of the inapplicability of a universal healthcare standard to all humans.