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Dear Josh:

If you haven't already done such a column (I have only seen two), how about one on ethical and scientific problems arising in research on human subjects. I would like to see what you would do with the dilemma of the necessity of keeping the ~~xxx~~ subject somewhat in the dark (as with placebos) while at the same time complying with a moral obligation to keep him as fully informed as possible. I could imagine that in some kinds of experiments the fact that a person is told that he is receiving either a drug or a placebo might create a bias. Whether there is such an example I don't know, but the general issue is: Is an investigator ever justified in withholding information from a subject?

Best wishes.



JAMES
F. ROW

Dear Jim-- I have been thinking of this for some time, especially since Beecher's stringent and widely publicized comments. (I am also on Clinical Research Center Policy Committee at the school here). In controlled trials, patients must be told they are in the experiment, but not whether as individuals they are receiving the drug or a placebo. Is this a great difficulty? Of course when a dubious new drug is being contrasted with some established procedure, there is a real problem.

I guess I am also deeply exercised about the fruitless risks to which patients are exposed, even with their consent, in experiments so poorly designed they can tell nothing-- which is all too typical!

Here are a couple of more recent ones. ~~8787~~ N.B. The WashPost would be delighted to sell the column to local papers!

sent 9/13/66