

Release of Data from Unethical Experiments

Code of Medical Ethics Opinion 7.2.2

Research that violates the fundamental principle of respect for persons and basic standards of human dignity, such as Nazi experiments during World War II or from the US Public Health Service Tuskegee Syphilis Study, is unethical and of questionable scientific value. Data obtained from such cruel and inhumane experiments should virtually never be published. If data from unethical experiments can be replaced by data from ethically sound research and achieve the same ends, then such must be done. In the rare instances when ethically tainted data have been validated by rigorous scientific analysis, are the only data of such nature available, and human lives would certainly be lost without the knowledge obtained from the data, it may be permissible to use or publish findings from unethical experiments.

Physicians who engage with data from unethical experiments as authors, peer reviewers, or editors of medical publications should:

1. () Disclose that the data derive from studies that do not meet contemporary standards for the ethical conduct of research.
2. () Clearly describe and acknowledge the unethical nature of the experiment(s) from which the data are derived.
3. () Provide ethically compelling reasons for which the data are being released or cited, such as the need to save human lives when no other relevant data are available.
4. () Pay respect to those who were the victims of the unethical experimentation.

AMA Principles of Medical Ethics: II, V, VII

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