

Research scandals – lessons from history

You may think that all researchers would automatically use the research principles listed in this section, but they don't. There are some horrific reminders of why people need protection from researchers:

- a. **1946-1947: The Doctors Trials (part of the Nuremberg Trials).** Twenty-three doctors carried out barbaric experiments on concentration camp prisoners against their will under the German Nazi regime. These experiments often ended in maiming or death of the victims.
- b. **1958: Thalidomide** was prescribed to pregnant women to stop morning sickness. As a result, thousands of babies in around 50 countries were born with limb deformations and, in severe cases, damage to eyes, ears and internal organs. In 1968, the drug company was forced to pay compensation to the victims.
- c. **1932-1972: Tuskegee Syphilis Study.** The USA's Public Health Service monitored 399 African-American men infected with syphilis. The men were not told about their disease or about the penicillin cure when it became available in the 1950s. Shockingly, they discouraged the men's doctors from curing them. Many died of syphilis during the study. Only public outrage brought the study to an end after it was leaked. The survivors did not receive a presidential apology until 1997.

In response to these and other atrocities, the following ethics codes were written:

- 1947: The ten research principles of the Nuremberg Code were drawn up in response to the Nuremberg trials. This was the first international research ethics code. Click here to see them: <http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines/nuremberg.html>.
- 1964 The World Medical Association published the **Declaration of Helsinki** which contains regularly updated guidelines for the involvement of human participants in research, including children's and vulnerable people. You can see it here: <http://www.wma.net/en/30publications/10policies/b3/>
- 1979 Belmont report (published by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, USA). Click here to see it: <http://ohsr.od.nih.gov/guidelines/belmont.html>

Today many professional organisations publish research guidelines which are based upon these codes.