

## **"The Abuse of Man: An Illustrated History of Dubious Medical Experimentation"**

Wolfgang Weyers, M.D., 2003, 755 pages, Ardor Scribendi, \$35.00

Review by Norman M. Goldfarb

"The Abuse of Man: An Illustrated History of Dubious Medical Experimentation" is a mind-boggling history of the dark side of clinical research. This book is one of the most fascinating and important books of non-fiction ever written in any field. We are blessed that Dr. Weyers, a practicing dermatologist, happens to be interested in clinical research.

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The book provides a long litany of horrors that will satisfy even the most morbid reader. Because much early medical experimentation was dermatological and venereal, some of the illustrations may haunt your dreams. The faint-of-heart may want a friend with stronger nerves to redact the most gruesome.

However, more importantly, the book explains the social and cultural context of medical experimentation that "unethical" does not even begin to describe. It also describes efforts over the centuries to raise ethical standards and establish workable regulatory environments. Every prospective principal investigator and IRB member should read this book because it explains how highly-educated, well-intentioned, "normal" people can conduct (often pointless) research that serves only to harm subjects and tear society's moral fabric. It also demonstrates that government regulations do not spring fully-formed from the mind of bureaucrats with nothing better to do. Rather, they result from gross and often repeated abuses of the public trust.

Abuses by Nazi doctors are easy to criticize, and rightly so, but they were just an insane logical conclusion to over 100 years of ghastly experiments by doctors in Germany and elsewhere. On the other hand:

- The "Instructions of the Prussian Minister of Culture to the Directors of Clinics, Polyclinics, and Other Health Care Institutions" of 1900 was the first government policy in any country governing informed consent in clinical research.
- The "Circular of the Minister of the Interior of the German Reich Concerning Guidelines for Innovative Therapy and Human Experimentation" of 1931 included research standards not met by even the Nuremberg Code and Declaration of Helsinki.

After World War II physicians in the U.S. and other countries blithely ignored the Nuremberg code. The Tuskegee Syphilis Study springs to mind, but literally thousands of other experiments evidenced no apparent regard for subject welfare. As Dr. Weyers points out, it is no coincidence that society got serious about tackling unethical clinical research in the 1960s, when the image of doctor-as-godlike-hero fell in a general rejection of authority. The process is by no-means complete today. For example, the informed consent process is still a work-in-progress.

Fortunately, we live in enlightened times, so the worst is presumably behind us. However, as Editor of the Journal, I hear stories that, if true, suggest that our collective hands are still not clean. Does "Nobody screen-fails at our site." sound ethical to you? It is thus the duty of every clinical research professional to stand guard and speak out against betrayals of our industry and the public we serve.

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The book is available at <http://www.derm101.com/store/index.asp>. Buy it. Read it.

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