"Ethical Dilemma in Using *Placebo* for Drug Research"

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ABSTRACT

Article 6(2) of the *Universal Declaration of Bioethics and Human Rights* clearly states that scientific research on human subjects should only be carried out with the prior, free and informed consent of the person concerned. This *Declaration* inevitably creates ethical dilemma in medical research. During tests on new drugs, researchers usually divide patients into groups. The *experimental group* receives the "*test*" drug to be tested. The *control group* is given a *placebo,* a resemblance of the "test" drug but with no medicinal value in it. This group is ***never told the truth*** about the *placebo*, so participants believe they are receiving proper treatment just like other patients**.** Hence, the ethical dilemma! The researcher is caught between the *obligation* to **tell the truth,** as required by **Article 6(2),** and the *need* to **conceal truth,** as required by this scientific methodology. This paper examines this dilemma through the lens of two divergent ethical theories of **Utilitarianism** and **Categorical Imperative**, expounded by John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant respectively. To resolve this dilemma, the paper suggests that the researcher be guided by either or both of these theories to help decide whether or not the use of *placebo* is an ethically justifiable lie.

KEY WORDS

Consent, experimental group, control group, "test" drug, Utilitarianism, Categorical Imperative