

# Editorial

Currently, almost everything that we associate to science was developed in the 20th Century: locomotion machines, inventions for communication, and significant discoveries in the areas of chemistry and biology, which often ended up as new medicines and exams methods. All these contribution changed the world known until then, consequently modifying also humanity's behavior.

However, we should not forget that a major portion of this progress derived from researches undertaken in the two world wars that marked that century. It was due to them that an extraordinary volume of economic and human resources were targeted to science, proportionating so many and so fabulous discoveries in such short time.

Many of these ideas, since they took place during this disturbed period (in which the idea of human rights was not consolidated in the scientific realm) happened with investigation processes completely deprived of any ethical criterion, particularly in the health sector. Both the German State under Nazism and in the so-called Western democratic societies, as shown by Beecher <sup>1</sup>, human beings participating in these trial were treated as "things", research subjects submitted to unworthy conditions during tests, inclusively leading to their death.

Experiments related in Beecher's study seem to be just the tip of the iceberg of a whole series of researches carried out during those decades. Such conjecture may be evidenced by the casual discovery, in 2010, of studies undertaken in Guatemala during the 1940s by US health services. That research targeted following up the natural history of syphilis and gonorrhea and to that extent, 1,500 particularly vulnerable individuals were infected <sup>2</sup>.

If now the disclosure of this research causes "scandal" and indignation in the scientific world, it presupposes that researcher's ethical awareness enhanced throughout the last decades regarding what could and what could not be done in studies involving humans. One can presume, inclusively, that abominable facts such as this are not anymore part of the research routine of serious researchers committed to humanity's wellbeing, one of science's own self-justifications. Still, we can imagine that instruments such as the 1964 Helsinki Declaration contributed to researchers' moral enhancement, and which provided ethical parameters for conducting studies.

However, considering the 2008 changes in the Helsinki Declaration ( that admits use of placebo and discontinuity of treatment after study completion), and knowing the immeasurable economic interests involving researches <sup>3</sup> and bearing in mind, still, the colonialist features of the "*trainings*"

toward researchers from developing countries <sup>4</sup>, can we be sure even that such abominable situations will ever occur again? Considering the magnitude of these forces, this has been a constant concern of Revista Bioética editors and of its Editorial board. For this reason, we try to present in each issue articles that may cause reflection on current ethical problems involving research, clinic, and social life. We hope, therefore, to stimulate ethical awareness and providing capacity to our readers for better decision-making in their professional life. That is, to contribute so each one, doing whatever he/she does, will produce a significant improvement in quality of life for humanity as a whole.

### References

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