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Experimentation in humans: Science, history, politics, ethics and ideologies

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Medical human subject research strongly increased in the late 19th century, decades after Edward Jenner's work on the smallpox vaccination, which took place around 1800. Since then, vaccination studies have remained a major part of the research performed on humans. The increase in these studies was accompanied by political, social and ethical concerns: experimentation required sacrifices, implied risks, and its benefits were rarely relevant for those who became (willingly or not) the subjects of research. The question of when ethical issues began to occupy an important place in discussions on biomedical research is particularly interesting and its historical emergence needs to be better understood.

Medical experimentation in humans became, after the Second World War, the symbol of scientific abuse *per se*, and various codes and legislation covering this topic – the Nuremberg Code and the Declaration of Helsinki among others – were constructed in the aftermath of this dark time.

During the last 30 years, the public image of human subject experimentation has changed significantly. In some countries, large scale patients' movements, first in the area of AIDS research, and then more recently, in cancer studies, started to give a much more positive picture of this biomedical research. A shift can be observed from the idea of defending patients' rights within studies towards the idea of having a right to take part in a clinical trial. Yet, at the same time, the constantly growing field in African countries of biomedical studies without consent and the abuses committed by big pharmaceutical companies are a source of rising mistrust.

This workshop will acknowledge the tension between these two contrasting images of biomedical human subject research, while at the same time examining how the aims and limits of this medical experimentation are defined and acknowledging its ethical concerns. We will explore the scientific and the current political and social tensions related to these questions in developing countries as well as the limitations that might

be imposed on experimentation in Western countries not only for “ethical” reasons, but also because of more general societal and political concerns.

The Jacques Loeb Centre is organizing this workshop as a truly interdisciplinary event at BGU, with the active participation of faculty and students from many departments and fields of research, such as medicine, biology, history of medicine, ethics, and philosophy. Scholars from other Israeli universities and other institutions are invited as well, and one or two participants will come from abroad.