

Biologics, Ethics and Policy Implications- An Opinion on Ethical Imperatives



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Opinion

Many scholars, researchers and practitioners have engaged in great debates concerning the relationship between biotechnology research and ethics. There exists ethical dilemmas as to what constitutes the right and wrong ways of conducting research especially where human and plant life is involved. Ethics are norms that govern how humans should behave as they interact with one another or their environment. It is a philosophical discourse of what is right or wrong. The position often held by many researchers that there is no clear right or wrong position is fundamentally flawed. Humans as intelligent beings know what is universally acceptable for them- the highest good in the community of humans. When looking at ethical positions, it is important to establish whether the action or decision taken benefits all and improves it just improves the lives of a few. We must also interrogate whether the consequences of an action harms a life including a potential one. Policy makers therefore, must always be guided by this system of ethical analysis before deciding on policy direction regarding promotion of biologics research. They must interrogate both the means and the end goals of research from an ethical standpoint before concluding whether a biotechnology breakthrough is fit to inform policy.

It is evident that increase in knowledge will inform health policy. It should be noted however, that desire to advance knowledge in order to solve human and plant life brings moral conundrums as various groups of researchers hold different positions depending on their values orientation. For example, is

it morally right to destroy a life in order to advance knowledge? This is a question that has sparked huge debates between moral philosophers and health researchers. There are those who argue that it is okay for biologic tests to negatively affect few lives but ultimately improve the quality of life for the majority. Do the few lives affected during trials matter? How should we get the results we so desire without negatively affecting lives? These are the questions that biotechnology researchers must grapple with and come up with answers that will leave none disadvantaged including the unborn. As Aristotle taught us thousands of years ago, the best pursuit in life is the search for the highest good. Take for instance, stem cell research. Two opposing views are out there in the public and scientific discourses. The general public view is that stem cell research is harmful to life while the scientific community views it as potential to improve the quality of human life. The potential of stem cell research for the treatment of diseases should be ethically sensitive in the sense that no life should be lost, be it for full-grown human or an embryo.

This position has serious implications for policy makers because policy decisions will have to be based on ethical decisions. Decisions by policy makers to promote a certain line of research, fund it, provide policy and regulatory framework will all be guided by certain fundamental values that will be acceptable to the majority of people. The goal of biologics must always be win-win. In other words, no life is lost and the research outcomes result in improved quality of life.



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