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# EDITORIAL

## ETHICS AND RESEARCH – ETHICS IN DAILY LIFE

Undoubtedly, one of the most expressive advances in the field of research in the last decades has been the universalization of the issues related to ethics in research. This acceptance can be witnessed by the growing number of Committees on Ethics in Research (CER) and by the frequent discussion of the issue among researchers, from junior to senior ones. There has been a long effort to include these questions in the practice of biological and health sciences but, nowadays, ethical aspects are fully integrated in the research agenda. Universities and other research institutions, governmental or private, have quickly constituted their Committees on Ethics in Research and the National Commission of Ethics in Research (CONEP) has been consolidated as a superior instance for the solution of complex cases or with specific peculiarities, and as a reference to the local committees in what concern organization and doctrines.

As a result the issue of ethics in research has extrapolated the academic milieu and is also discussed in a less specialized level – what is most welcome. Indeed, the primary aim of ethics in research is to preserve the autonomy of the research subject that, in most instances, is a member of this same less specialized level.

In this sense, the concept of ethics, in a Cartesian approach, can be taken as a reference on what is right or wrong, good or bad, the good in opposition to evil (SINGER, 1999). Certainly, it is not opportune to fully discuss here the issue of the Rousseau's view of the intrinsic kindness of men or its Kantian opposition expressed by the rational ethic of the moral duty and, last but not least, the Enghelian proposal of the social determinants as the landmark of our moral (MESQUITA, 2004). However, the fact is that ethics and

morality are powerful instruments in many instances and strata of the modern society and, as instruments, they can be use wisely or wrongly. If one transposes this ample concept to the field of ethics in research, the determinants are more clear and the ethical precepts are becoming less ambiguous due mainly to the mentioned greater dissemination of the issues related to ethics in research, to the constitution of the committees of ethics and the natural improvement of the agenda on ethics provoked by the increasing knowledge as a result of the discussion of these committees and from the CONEP.

However, the wide dissemination of issues related to ethics in research causes concerns to arise. One of them is the possibility of an easy and irresponsible manifestation on the ethical aspects of a research proposal made, usually, for reasons other than those to protect the subject of research. A practical example of this danger was the manifestation of a national medical society related to skin diseases on a project on validation of a medical diagnosis of public health interest to be implemented by a respectful research institution in the medical area in the State of São Paulo. As a matter of fact, the project has already been approved by two committees on ethics in research. However, due to personal problems of members of this society with other involved institutions in this project, it was said that it had serious ethical problems. This sort of open manifestation launches the project in a misty scenario of doubts and regrets, as well as the institution in charge of its implementation and its leaders.

Certainly, the ethical issues, and not less ethics in research, at times cause disparate interpretations, once the basic principles of ethics according to the codes of the western civilization are assured. But the use of personal perceptions to launch ethical doubts is a dangerous voyage. Here again is a good reason to the existence of committees of ethics in research (BRASIL, 1996). These committees, of open minded and multidisciplinary constitution, have the responsibility to assure the fulfillment of those mentioned basic principles – which is easier – and also, more difficult, to distinguish and solve the intricate events situated in the slippery region between fact and interpretation.

To cope with problems of such order Committees of Ethics in Research need improvement and refinement, not only in its composition as well as in the capacity of its members (BRASIL, 1996). Just technical competence in varied areas of sciences is not enough. Each member needs a widened vision to the different areas of human knowledge. On the one hand, those of the areas of health and biological sciences need to improve their knowledge on humanities, particularly philosophy and ethics. On the other hand, human sciences

researchers need to get in touch with the main distressing issues faced by professionals in the areas of health and biological sciences. In spite of the marked advance in science, biomedicine is facing deep abysses as it experiences the social differences in countries like Brazil, particularly in what regards health technologies.

Therefore, with a wider vision, members of a Committee can better perceive the limits of the convenience of the advantages of creating knowledge, of the autonomy of the individual and of the personal will of the researcher. It deals with a delicate equilibrium of difficult elucidation, in which the autonomy of the subject of the research, with no doubts, is the one that can prevail. However, with this widened vision, the members of the committee can comply with increased probity their important function, among them, to prevent the inadequate use of the holiness of ethics for personal profit.

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