

Pre-draft 1.1
The Ethics of Human Experimentation

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1 The Declaration of Helsinki and the Belmont Report

1. What are the three most important similarities between the documents? Why did you choose these as “most important?”

i) Both place a greater importance on the patient over the research. This assumption reveals the deontological nature of both the papers as the utilitarian argument is ignored. In effect, both papers basically discourage human sacrifice for the greater good.

ii) In both cases the responsibility lies with the physician and not the patient/subject, even despite grant of consent.

iii) Both reports emphasise the benefit to the population that the patient/subject represents. While this is a practical measure against abuse or exploitation of certain populations, it emphasises that the individual represents much more than the self.

I have chosen these as the most important similarities as they reveal the assumptions that both start with when constructing their matter.

2. What are the three most important differences between the documents? Why did you choose these as “most important?”

i) The Belmont Report talks extensively about broader ethical principles and refrains from specific guidelines while the Declaration of Helsinki specifies exact rules of conduct for physicians.

ii) The Belmont report does not suggest the creation of or reference to a particular committee while the Declaration of Helsinki specifically refers to a research ethics committee.

iii) The Belmont report transfers consent for a subject/patient unable to give consent to those who would “act in the best interest of the subject/patient” while The Declaration of Helsinki transfers it to a research ethics committee.

I have chosen these as the most important differences as they reveal the difference in intents of both of the reports. One is a rough general guideline, while the other is very prescriptive. It’s interesting to note that the detailed prescriptive one (Helsinki) preceded the general broad one (Belmont). Belmont seems to be an simple reiteration of the aims and philosophy of Helsinki.

3. What questions do you have about these documents?

i) What does the comparison of risks and benefits in section 2 of part C of the Belmont report practically mean?