

Ethics of Drug Trialling

This activity involves :

- reading an article from New Scientist
- discussion of a specific ethical issue involved in drug trialling
- engagement with a range of ‘decisions about science and technology’
- examination of the position of views either side of an argument

Resources

NS article NS 3rd March 2001 No.2280, **Opinion Point** ‘Taking the Plunge’; Julian Savulescu, student worksheet.

The article can be downloaded from the New Scientist archive on their website if your institution subscribes to the archive.

1. After reading the article, students are asked to summarise the main arguments for and against paying volunteers an amount which reflects the risk they are taking in drug trials by organising the arguments under the 2 headings on page 2:

References

Textbook
Chapter 3

Specification
9.3 Medical Ethics

12.5 a-i

Directed activities related to text

Passive reading techniques such as copying text from the board rarely involve deciphering and comprehension of the text. There are many ways that reading text can be made into a more active process.

Making notes from a chapter can be made more active by providing particular headings to structure the notes. Even better, students can be asked to summarise ideas in the text, or present ideas in an alternative form such as a flow chart, table or mind map.

Students could be asked to devise questions they have on the text. This will help identify problem areas. As a group activity, students could swap questions, and discuss the answers. They could also attempt to answer each other’s questions and hand them back for ‘marking’.

Active engagement with texts is needed when students are asked to seek information for a task such as researching for a presentation, or making an information leaflet or poster.

Questions relating to a text can be provided to create a comprehension exercise. Questions can be carefully worded to discourage copying of passages from the text, and encourage re-writing or interpretation of the text. It can be useful to highlight passages which answer questions or provide information for an explanation.

Why drug trial volunteers should be paid to reflect their risk-taking	Why large payments should not be made to drug-trial volunteers
<p>e.g. more likely to recruit the particular individuals needed such as those suffering from rare genetic disease</p> <p>benefits such as access to new expensive treatments is not regarded as unacceptable, but could have the same arguments against them applied</p> <p>the volunteer should benefit from the financial rewards of producing a new drug, otherwise they are being exploited</p> <p>It is patronising to suggest that people can't weigh risk against financial gains in their lives.</p>	<p>people may be induced to take risks by the financial gain that they would not otherwise take</p> <p>the financial inducement may bias the uptake of volunteers in a randomised trial</p> <p>offering payment assumes that people are competent and rational, able to make the necessary decision - they may not be</p>

The 2 main arguments from each side are prioritised

2. As a class, students examine all these priority arguments that have been produced and organise the arguments into the following categories e.g. :

Arguments which are based on the technical requirements of drug trials	Arguments which are based on ethical issues
<p>the financial inducement may bias the uptake of volunteers in a randomised trial</p> <p>more likely to recruit the particular individuals needed such as those suffering from rare genetic disease</p>	<p>offering payment assumes that people are competent and rational, able to make the necessary decision - they may not be</p> <p>people may be induced to take risks by the financial gain that they would not otherwise take</p> <p>benefits such as access to new expensive treatments is not regarded as unacceptable, but could have the same arguments against them applied</p> <p>the volunteer should benefit from the financial rewards of producing a new drug, otherwise they are being exploited</p> <p>It is patronising to suggest that people can't weigh risk against financial gains in their lives.</p>

(There are technical and ethical arguments on both sides)

5. In a situation of trialling a drug that could potentially be of great benefit to a large number of patients, is the sacrifice of an individual's rights justified for the good of society?

Class discussion of this will probably display a spread of views, but it is important that students are able to summarise the arguments on both sides, whatever their individual viewpoint.

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1. Read New Scientist article: NS 3rd March 2001; Issue No.2280, **Opinion Point** 'Taking the Plunge' ; Julian Savulescu. The article can be downloaded from the New Scientist website if your institution subscribes to the archive.

Summarise the main arguments for and against paying volunteers an amount which reflects the risk they are taking in drug trials. The article emphasises arguments 'for' payment, so you need to decide on some 'against' arguments. Organise the arguments under 2 headings:

Why drug trial volunteers should be paid to reflect their risk-taking	Why large payments should not be made to drug-trial volunteers

In your group, prioritise the arguments that people have produced to decide on the most important 2 arguments for and 2 most important against these payments.

2. As a class, examine all these priority arguments that have been produced.

Categorise the arguments into the following categories :

Arguments which are based on the technical requirements of drug trials	Arguments which are based on ethical issues

3. Are the main arguments against paying volunteers technical/ethical?

4. Are the main arguments for paying them technical/ethical?

Discuss and make brief summary notes:

5. In a situation of trialling a drug that could potentially be of great benefit to a large number of patients, is the sacrifice of an individual's rights justified for the good of society ?