THE INDUCEMENT OF MEANINGFUL WORK: A RESPONSE TO ANDERSON AND WEIJER

ABSTRACT. James A. Anderson and Charles Weijer take the wage payment model proposed by Neil Dickert and Christine Grady and extend the analogy of research participation to unskilled wage labor to include just working conditions. Although noble in its intentions, this moral extension generates unsavory outcomes. Most notably, Anderson and Weijer distinguish between two types of research subjects: occasional and professional. The latter, in this case, receives benefits beyond the moral minima in the form of “the right to meaningful work.” The problem is that meaningful work can itself be a form of inducement, and consequently, may in fact increase the incidence of inducement contrary to the intentions of the wage payment model.

KEY WORDS: clinical trials, ethics, inducement, meaningful work, research subject

The undue influence of the impecunious members of society into clinical research trials occurs all too frequently. A chilling example recently published in the New York Times details the suicide of a nineteen-year-old college student during a clinical trial for Cymbalta. The student was paid $150 per day plus meals for a thirty-day experiment. However, four days after being removed from the drug and placed on a placebo, she committed suicide in the dormitory type laboratory at the Indiana University Medical Center. Several ethical concerns are raised by this example involving both the failure of researchers to provide due care to the research participant and whether research experiments should be targeting those in financial need by offering enticing amounts of financial compensation for their participation.

One attempt to address the issue of undue inducement is the wage payment model proposed by Neil Dickert and Christine Grady. This model aims at reducing inducement by treating research participation as analogous to other forms of unskilled, but nevertheless essential, forms of labor through the payment of a “fairly low, standardized hourly wage.” The hope is that by presenting research participation...
on an even keel with other low paying jobs, individuals will not be
induced by the promotion of large sum payouts and perhaps choose
other, and presumably safer, income opportunities.\footnote{3}

Building on this, James A. Anderson and Charles Weijer take the
wage payment model to its moral extension in the form of \textit{just
working conditions}. In order to realize the potential for substantial
moral improvements with research conditions, research participants
need to be divided into categories similar to other forms of unskilled
wage labor.\footnote{4} Most notably, the distinction between temporary and
career workers is treated analogously to two types of research par-
ticipants: \textit{occasional} and \textit{professional}. The primary moral difference
between these two types of research participants is based on the level
of \textit{dependence}, \textit{commitment}, and \textit{investment} each provides the
research community. Usually occasional research subjects, like our
nineteen year-old college student, would only be participating in
research to alleviate some temporary financial hardships. This would
not necessarily be the case with the professional research subject.
Research participation is a career in the sense that the level of
dependence, commitment, and investment offered to the research
community is comparatively greater than that of the occasional
research subject.\footnote{5} This elevated degree of dependence, commitment,
and investment would also warrant a corresponding degree of
benefits beyond the moral minima. In traditional forms of wage
labor, extra benefits of this sort may include pensions, unionization,
and paid vacations.\footnote{6} For the professional research subject, Anderson
and Weijer propose an alternative benefit: the right to meaningful
work.\footnote{7}

This alternative benefit, however, proves to be problematic. For
one, attributing a right to meaningful work to the professional
research subject could effectively divorce him from consideration in
research trials. Stated differently, if given the choice, research
institutions may be more inclined to opt for the occasional research
subject void of a right to meaningful work. This may be especially
ture considering that a right to meaningful work entails, amongst
other things, “having a say in the research process itself.”\footnote{8} Of course,
the optimist could respond that researchers could conceivably
embrace the possibility of a more collaborative effort involving input
from professional research participants. Unfortunately, since we have
no clear way of predicting either outcome, we should be mindful of
the pressures facing researchers to advance medical knowledge that