

Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment

EDE 9816 Ethical Issues in Organizations
Dr. Perry

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Study

The Tuskegee Experiment was a clinical study conducted between 1932 and 1972 by the U.S. Public Health Service to study the natural progression of untreated syphilis in rural African American men who thought they were receiving free health care from the U.S. government

Ethical Issues – Utilitarian Perspective

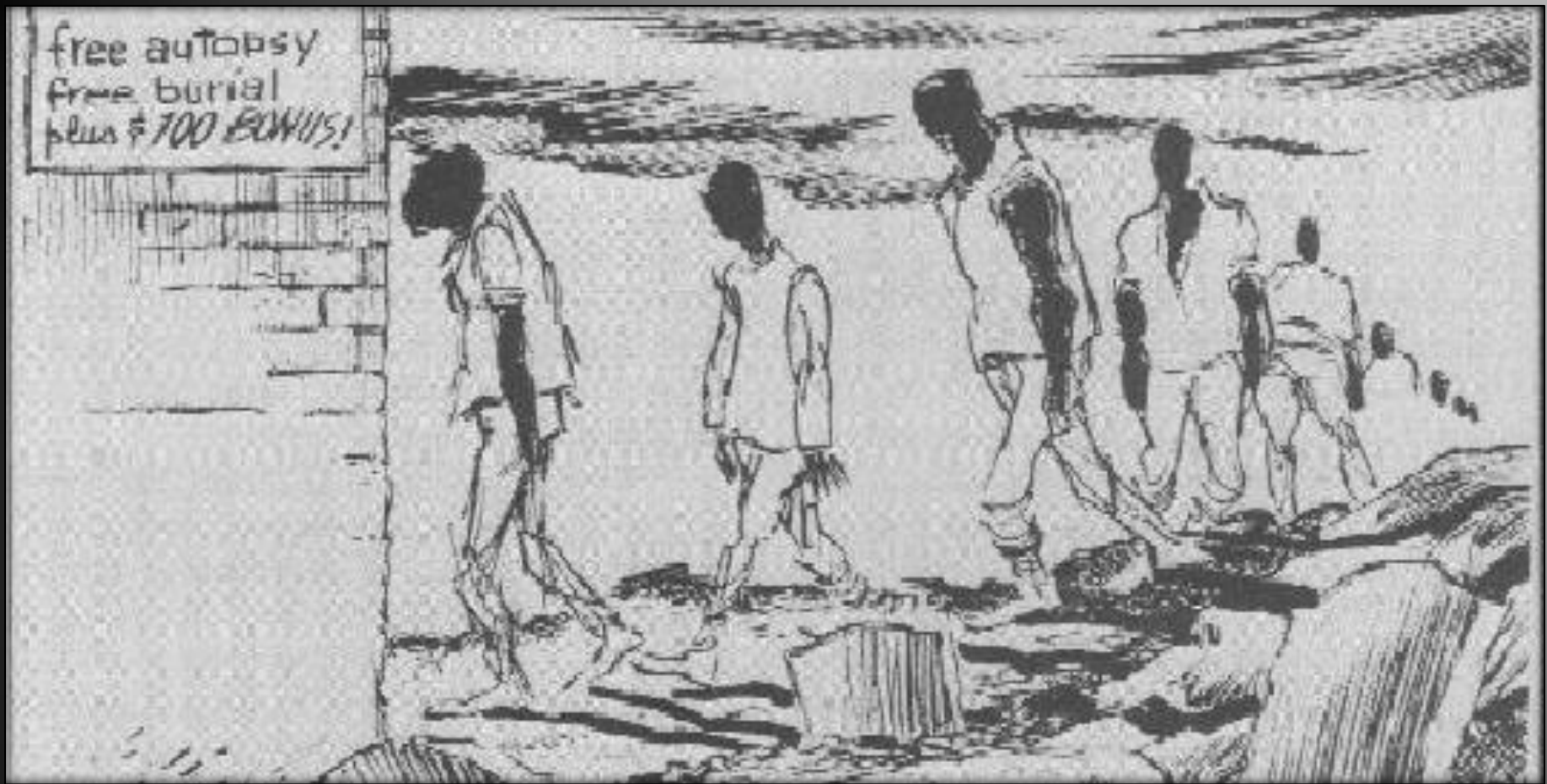
▶ Premise of Experiment

- Ends justify the means = consequences as perceived for the greater good
- To contribute to the health care of an impoverished community
- Offered free clinical treatments at Tuskegee Institute; the treatment contract included:
 - free commutation to the university
 - a free hot meal on days of treatment
 - treatment of any other additional illnesses

Sample

- ▶ The Public Health Service, working with the Tuskegee Institute, began the study in 1932.
- ▶ 600 impoverished sharecroppers from Macon County, Alabama.
 - 399 who had previously contracted syphilis before the study began
 - 201 without the disease
- ▶ The men were given free medical care, meals, and free burial insurance for participating in the study.





To ensure that the men would show up for the possibly dangerous, painful, diagnostic, and non-therapeutic spinal taps, the doctors sent the 400 patients a misleading letter titled "Last Chance for Special Free Treatment". The study also required all participants to undergo an autopsy after death in order to receive funeral benefits. After penicillin was discovered as a cure, researchers continued to deny such treatment to many study participants.

Ethical Dilemmas

▶ Gross Misrepresentation

- Intent of Treatment – to assess different symptoms or effects of syphilis as it relates to race – white vs. black – the true nature of the experiment was not disclosed to subjects to ensure their cooperation e.g., Ethical Health Issues – Henrietta Lacks Story
- No Informed Consent
- False Diagnosis – subjects were led to believe that they suffered from “bad blood” as opposed to syphilis
- Withheld Viable Treatment – upon discovery in 1947, antibiotic treatment of penicillin was neither disclosed or administered to subjects

Medicine?!

- ▶ By the late 1940s, doctors, hospitals and public health centers throughout the country routinely treated diagnosed syphilis with penicillin. No one appeared to have reevaluated the protocols of the Tuskegee Study according to the new standards.



PENICILLIN MASS-PRODUCED IN 1944

Ethical Dilemmas

- ▶ **Violation of Normal Medical Practice**
 - Violation of Hippocratic Oath
 - Issue of Trust
 - Intentional Miscommunication
 - Explicit requirement of the Tuskegee Experiment was that the subjects not receive available treatment of penicillin
- ▶ **Human Rights Violation**
 - Prejudicial Act?
 - Issue of Racism?
 - Standards applied to those of the times?
 - Conforming to social standards does not necessarily imply ethical conduct

Ethical Dilemmas

- ▶ Tuskegee Experiment led to the following:
 - The Tuskegee Syphilis Study, cited as "arguably the most infamous biomedical research study in U.S. history,"^[9] led to the 1979 Belmont Report and the establishment of the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP).^[10] It also led to federal laws and regulations requiring Institutional Review Boards for the protection of human subjects in studies involving human subjects. The Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) manages this responsibility within the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).^[11]

Ethical Dilemmas

- ▶ By the late 1940s, doctors, hospitals and public health centers throughout the country routinely treated diagnosed syphilis with penicillin. In the period following World War II, the revelation of the Holocaust and related Nazi medical abuses brought about changes in international law. Western allies formulated the Nuremberg Code to protect the rights of research subjects. No one appeared to have reevaluated the protocols of the Tuskegee Study according to the new standards.

Findings from 1969

- ▶ Total Original Classification
 - 425 Syphilitic
 - 200 Control
- ▶ Known Dead
 - 276 Syphilitic
 - 96 Control

DATA PRESENTED BY DR. B. C. BROWN

Classification of Cases in Tuskegee Study

	Controls	Syphilitic	Total
Classification at initial examination	200	411	611
Cases added in 1938-1939	-	14	14
<u>Total - Original classification</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>425</u>	<u>625</u>
Controls infected during observation	-9	+9	-
Controls reclassified as syphilitic on basis of additional history	-1	+1	-
on basis of treponemal tests	-8	+8	-
<u>Total - Final classification</u>	<u>182</u>	<u>443</u>	<u>625</u>
Known dead - Number	97	276	373
Percent	53.3	62.3	59.7
Remainder -	85	167	252
Examined in 1968			
Number	36	53	89
Percent	42.4	31.7	35.3

2/4/69: az

Documents

MEMORANDUM DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

TO : Director
Center for Disease Control
THROUGH: Administrator, HS *Red* *4/22* DATE: NOV 16 1972

FROM : Assistant Secretary for Health

SUBJECT: Termination of USPHS Study of Untreated Syphilis (the Tuskegee Study)

As recommended by the Tuskegee Syphilis Study Ad Hoc Advisory Panel, I have decided that the "Tuskegee Study" as a study of untreated syphilis must be terminated. I will advise you of the necessary steps to be taken to assure that appropriate medical care be given to all remaining participants in the "Tuskegee Study" as a part of the close-out phase of the project.

Merlin K. DuVal, M.D.
Merlin K. DuVal, M.D.

TERMINATION MEMO

DHEW USPHS, HSMHM
NOV 24 PM 12:04
DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL

Termination memo for
Tuskegee Experiment

The New York Times

Syphilis Victims in U.S. Study Went Untreated for 40 Years

By JEAN HELLER
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON, July 25—For 40 years the United States Public Health Service has conducted a study in which human beings with syphilis, who were induced to serve as guinea pigs, have gone without medical treatment for the disease and a few have died of its late effects, even though an effective therapy was eventually discovered.

The study was conducted to determine from autopsies what the disease does to the human body.

Officials of the health service who initiated the experiment have long since retired. Current officials, who say they

have serious doubts about the morality of the study, also say that it is too late to treat the syphilis in any surviving participants.

Doctors in the service say they are now rendering whatever other medical services they can give to the survivors while the study of the disease's effects continues.

Dr. Merlin K. DuVal, Assistant Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare for Health and Scientific Affairs, expressed shock on learning of the study. He said that he was making an immediate investigation.

The experiment, called the Tuskegee Study, began in 1932 with about 600 black men,

Syphilis victims in U.S. study
went untreated for forty years

The Whistleblower



Peter Buxton, a PHS venereal disease investigator, the "whistleblower"



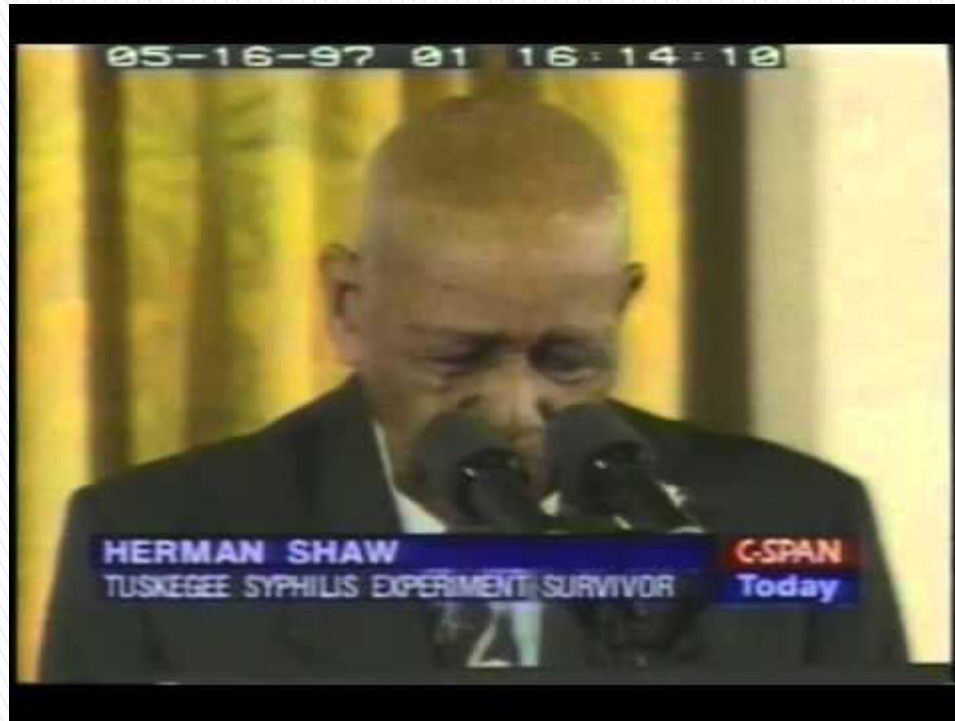
TUSKEGEE EXPERIMENT TEST SUBJECTS >>

THE MEN IN THIS PHOTOGRAPH HAVE NEVER BEEN IDENTIFIED

Aftermath



In 1974 Congress passed the National Research Act and created a commission to study and write regulations governing studies involving human participants. On May 16, 1997, President Bill Clinton formally apologized and held a ceremony for the Tuskegee study participants.



President Clinton says, ““What was done cannot be undone. But we can end the silence. We can stop turning our heads away. We can look at you in the eye and finally say on behalf of the American people, what the United States government did was shameful, and I am sorry ... To our African American citizens, I am sorry that your federal government orchestrated a study so clearly racist.”

Click on the photo to see the video of President Clinton’s apology for the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment