

6/10/99 PG. A-30

Should Doctors Sacrifice One Life to Save Many?

To the Editor:

Re "For Subjects in Haiti Study, Free AIDS Care Has a Price" (front page, June 6):

You quote a Haitian Medical Association official's description of the AIDS researcher Dr. Jean William Pape: "If he had to choose between the survival of 10 people and the survival of a nation, he would probably choose the survival of a nation." This statement is a measure of our medical and public health establishment's failure to provide a grounding in the ethics of research. The fact that it was meant to praise Dr. Pape demonstrates how abject that failure has been.

Presumably, Dr. Pape and his Cornell Medical College colleagues all once worked for the survival of individuals, not nations.

We have failed if doctors and researchers can no longer recognize that their wagers on a future AIDS

vaccine are covered with the lives of real people.

PHILIP ALCABES
Bronx, June 8, 1999

To the Editor:

Even after less expensive regimens of the drug AZT that are designed for poor countries have been proved to reduce H.I.V. transmission from mother to infant, this regimen is still unavailable to most people who could benefit from it, including residents in the countries that were host to the trials (front page, June 6). The National Institutes of Health is supporting a new generation of mother-infant studies in southern Africa in which the less expensive regimens are still not being provided.

The international research community has responded to criticisms of studies in which effective therapy is withheld by trying to rewrite governing ethics documents. Yet instead of mandating that participants receive the best proven therapeutic method, a proposed revision to the Helsinki Declaration by the World Medical Association would mandate the treatment only if it "would otherwise be available."

PETER LURIE, M.D.

Washington, June 7, 1999

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