

Ethics & Medical Research

Equipoise & The Ethics of Randomization

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Readings

- Steven Joffe & Robert Truog, “Equipoise and Randomization”, pp. 245–260.

Questions

1. According to Joffe and Truog, what are the ethical concerns with randomized clinical trials, and how is equipoise supposed to resolve them?
2. What are the different conceptions of equipoise discussed by Joffe and Truog? What problems or deficiencies does each conception have?
3. What are the alternative approaches to dealing with randomization’s concerns presented by Joffe and Truog? What problems or deficiencies does each have?
4. What are the reasons for and against withholding interim data during a clinical trial? How might the particular conception of equipoise influence whether to withhold that data or not? How might this conception also influence the acceptance of the other “practical responses” discussed by Joffe and Truog?
5. What are the other ethical issues with randomized clinical trials that Joffe and Truog address?