

Tekst 4

Medical experiments: any volunteers?

HEALTH CHECK



**JEREMY
LAURANCE**

- 1 WHAT WOULD have happened if the experimental treatment carried out on premature babies at North Staffordshire hospital had been a success?
- 2 This is a question worth asking, it seems to me, because it demonstrates our ambivalence towards new medical treatments. We want them if they work but there is hell to pay if they don't.
- 3 Yet even if they don't work there may still be good reasons for taking part in the research that demonstrates they don't. It is a fact, as Professor Simon Wessely of Kings College Hospital points out, that patients in trials tend to get better overall care. Events at North Staffordshire notwithstanding, they are generally looked after by enthusiastic, committed doctors who have a keen interest in what happens to them over and above the normal concern shown by doctors. If the outcome of the North Staffordshire debacle is that patients are deterred, it is not only medicine that will be the loser.
- 4 It is a truism, in medicine as in life, that no one ever expects the worst will happen to them. Even when the word "experimental" is attached to the word "treatment" I suspect most people would give it a go if their doctor was happy to.
- 5 So I wonder if, had the medical staff at North Staffordshire hospital who were heavily censured in the inquiry report published on

Monday, taken the proper care to explain the details of the research trial to the babies' parents, they would have ended up, as some parents claimed, with fewer takers.

- 6 The inquiry, chaired by Professor Rod Griffiths, director of public health for the West Midlands, concluded that parents had been misled. The new CNEP ventilator – Continuous Negative Extrathoracic Pressure – had been presented to them as the "gentler" option for the premature babies who had difficulty breathing, in contrast to the standard treatment of inserting a rigid plastic tube down their delicate windpipes, but they did not realise that the treatment was experimental.

- 7 Tragically, after five years (the trial ran from 1989 to 1993) it looked as if the new treatment was not working, even though the figures fell short of statistical proof.

- 8 But suppose the new CNEP ventilator had proved better than the standard one. It is unlikely that parents would have complained about lack of consent or that the inquiry would have been held. Indeed, protests might well have come from the parents whose babies were given the standard ventilator, complaining that they were getting second-rate care.

- 9 The best treatments in medicine can only be established in research trials which compare them with others – which means, by definition, that someone has to get the second best. The cavalier manner in which the research at North Staffordshire, led by Professor David Southall, was conducted is rightly criticised in the inquiry report. But the worst result would be if patients were no longer willing to participate in research.

- 10 A London director of public health told me recently about a trial of the drug beta interferon in multiple sclerosis which was oversubscribed with volunteers. Interestingly, many had already tried the drug and found it useless. What they were after was the extra care and attention they knew they would get as patients in the trial.

The Independent

■ Tekst 4 Medical experiments: any volunteers?

- 1p **4** Welke alinea geeft antwoord op de vraag gesteld in alinea 1?
- “If the outcome of the North Staffordshire debacle is that patients are deterred, ...” (einde alinea 3).
- 1p **5** Afgeschrikt waarvan?
- 1p **6** ■ What was the North Staffordshire hospital medical staff criticised for in the “inquiry report”, according to paragraphs 5 and 6?
- A It was falsely claimed that the new treatment was gentler than the standard treatment.
 - B Parents were given an over-optimistic picture of the effect of the treatment given to their babies.
 - C Parents were not told that their babies were taking part in a trial.
 - D The experimental treatment was continued even after it had proved ineffective.
- 1p **7** ■ Which of the following is/are true with regard to paragraph 9?
- 1 Jeremy Laurance shows himself to be in favour of experimental treatments.
 - 2 Jeremy Laurance disapproves of experimental research when babies are involved.
- A Only 1.
 - B Only 2.
 - C Both 1 and 2.
 - D Neither 1 nor 2.
- De informatie in de laatste zin van alinea 10 is al eerder in de tekst aan bod geweest.
- 1p **8** In welke alinea?