The Nazi Doctors Trial and Informed Consent in Medical Research

Lester Paldy

The International Medical Tribunal conducted at Nuremberg in 1947 to try German doctors and medical staff accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity was a landmark in the development of ethical codes governing the involvement of human subjects in medical research. This illustrated lecture for general audiences examines the events leading to the trial and its outcome that shaped the development of current ethical research codes.

Lester Paldy is Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus in the Department of Pathology and Department of Technology and Society at Stony Brook where he has taught since 1967. He teaches the Global Issues course to seniors in the undergraduate Honors College and is Distinguished Visiting Scholar in the Center for Medical Humanities, Compassionate Care, and Bioethics.

He served on the U.S. Geneva delegation that reached a nuclear weapons testing agreement with the Soviet Union signed by Presidents G.H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev and is a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. His interest in international efforts to ban nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons led to his exploration of the origins of medical codes requiring informed consent from research subjects.

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