

Process Paper

Medical history has often been documented as a series of groundbreaking discoveries and innovations. However, few stories are told of the lives oppurtunitized and bodies experimented on during this discovery process. And when we do not know our history, we are bound to repeat its mistakes. As future doctors and scientists, we chose the Tuskegee Syphilis Study to highlight the shames of our past and relay the importance of maintaining inalienable human rights over scientific discovery so that no similar event will happen ever again.

We began our research by utilizing various archives and publications from the National Library of Medicine and National Archives Catalog. Our group focused on understanding the events of the study and various perspectives of the doctors, patients and whistleblowers involved. One particularly helpful secondary source was “Racism and Research: The Case of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study”, as it was instrumental in understanding the events of the study and its ethical violations. The second primary source was the “Belmont Report” which discusses the impact of the Tuskegee Study on Human Subject Protection. We also uncovered various newspaper clippings and letters from the study. All of these sources contributed to our knowledge of the diverse aspects of this topic.

The Tuskegee Syphilis Study is a topic involving many primary source materials stored on a variety of archives. Since this event and its backlash is relatively recent, lots of photographs, audio recordings and video clips are available. To organize this in a simple format, we chose the option of a website. This format allowed us to express our research in a unique way, such as different forms of detailed analyses. Lastly, over the course of a few months, we created our website by summarizing our research, compiling our historical findings and organizing it in a systematic manner.

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Throughout the history of medicine and the United States, there is no greater example of rights and responsibilities in history than the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. This study was a foundation directly leading to the passage of legislation dictating the rights and responsibilities of patients and medical professionals. This was issued during President Clinton's apology and Belmont Report. This displays that patients have the right to informed consent and that it is the responsibility of the government to not violate patients' rights and to protect it. These rights also include the fact that African Americans were treated differently because of racism which was a large topic discussed during this time period where the Civil Rights Movement also occurred. Thus, the Tuskegee Syphilis Study is a great example of responding to the theme, rights and responsibilities in history which has forever changed our response to medical rules towards patients and their rights.