Guest editorial: Imperialism, research ethics and global health

SIR

I found the above editorial in your August issue very interesting. Comparing the ethical implications of global research from the perspective of the “Western” researchers is a topic of personal interest. In attempting to gain a perspective of the “Western” influences on ethics in general I found the following:

Table Using MEDLINE for the search and articles published since 1966

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>“Ethics”</th>
<th>“Truth”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of articles</td>
<td>50,868</td>
<td>3467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles in English</td>
<td>40,895</td>
<td>2831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-English articles</td>
<td>9973 (19.6%)</td>
<td>636 (18.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not only are Western values the most frequently applied, but as the literature grows the reinforcement of these values continues. Is this another example of ethical imperialism? Are those interested in the cultural variations in ethical values reading about them as referenced to Western standards, in journals refereed by those schooled in Western ethics?

Reference

1 Benatar SR. Imperialism, research ethics and global health. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 1998;24:221–2.

D LEONARD WERNER
Distinguished Teaching Professor, Department of Vision Sciences, State College of Optometry, State University of New York, 100 East 24th Street, New York 10010-3688, USA

Medical research needs lay involvement

SIR

In his editorial on why medical research needs lay involvement, Dr Tony Hope cites only publications written in professional, mostly medical, journals. For many years now, some patient-consumer groups have been pressing researchers and research funders to allow them to contribute to the research process. Not only are patient-consumer groups’ publications repressed by their views and underplay the extent to which lay people are ready to be involved in the research process. Dr Hope also mentions that the NHS standing advisory committee on consumer involvement is seeking “constructive” ways in which lay people can be involved. There is no shortage of issues that patient-consumer groups would like to see better researched, nor of lay people who would be delighted to sit on research committees.

Reference

1 Hope T. Medical research needs lay involvement. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 1998;24:291-2.

CHARLOTTE WILLIAMSON
Chair, CERES (Consumers for Ethical Research), PO Box 1365, London N16 0BS