

research involving the human embryo. It includes also the general philosophical questions on ethics of science and technology assessment.

The publication gives an overview of the scope and aims of the project and the biological and clinical implications, presents the discussion on recent sociological data on public attitudes towards embryo experimentation and related issues. It also presents the philosophical and the legal implications which need to be taken into account in a European discussion of embryo research and in other morally contentious areas of regulation.

The book begins with a chapter that explores embryo research from a scientific perspective. In this chapter the authors consider scientific and clinical aspects of research on human embryos. Then they take a look at the current state of regenerative medicine and stem cell research, as these are hotly debated areas that impinge on embryo research in several ways.

The next chapter is concerned with the regulation of embryo research in Europe, with laws governing embryo research where the authors survey and comment on the various approaches adopted by different countries, especially within Europe, and ask if it is possible to move towards some common regulatory mechanism. In order to elucidate possible regulative approaches, a detailed overview on regulations of embryo research and related issues is presented in an appendix at the end of the book.

Chapter 4 covers public attitudes towards embryo research and includes results from a new survey of opinions across Europe specifically conducted for this project.

The final chapter is a philosophical treatment of the arguments for and against embryo research, where the authors propose a rational basis for decision making in this field, a final philosophical analysis of the current political stances and the arguments used in the debate. The book closes with a list of recommendations on the moral status of the human embryo, safety measures that need to be established if embryo research is to be permitted, and possible regulation, which can be considered as the authors' most pertinent conclusions.

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Timmermans, S. and Berg, M. (eds.): 2003, *The Gold Standard. The Challenge of Evidence-Based Medicine and Standardization in Health Care*. Philadelphia:

Temple University Press. 269 pages. ISBN: 1-59213-188-3. Price: \$20.95.

Stefan Timmermans and Marc Berg have written a highly readable and comprehensive book. It was conceived during the 1998 meeting of the Society for Social Studies of Science and, indeed, covers the type of studies one could expect from the most qualified scholars gathering there. That is, from a sociological perspective, it spells out the details of how the process of standardisation runs through the context of health care, starting with the emergence of the patient record and culminating in the somewhat ambivalent focus on evidence-based medicine and accountability we can witness today. Presenting research the authors have done in recent years, they draw attention to the pitfalls and dangers, as well as the opportunities and advantages of standardisation. I guess many of those who work in a health care setting will not be surprised at finding that there is a gulf between clinical practice guidelines and the actual use of these guidelines, which is partly explained by a reluctance on the physicians' side to give up clinical autonomy and the fact that the individual patient often refuses to be adequately described by the guideline. The authors, however, go much deeper than that. For example, on pp. 90 ff. they demonstrate how the Nursing Interventions Classification, developed at the University of Iowa, has helped the nursing profession to establish itself as an identifiable profession, which can therefore protect itself against being downgraded to room service. This example shows that the authors acknowledge the fact that standardisation is not only about *individuals* adopting guidelines, but also, and even much more so, about a transformation of the health care *system*. Consequently, when, in the end, it comes to the challenge of evidence-based medicine, or the question how standardisation could help improve safety, effectiveness and patient-centredness, they argue that future efforts to meet this challenge should be focussed on the system, rather than the individual health care professional. As far as Timmermans and Berg are concerned, this challenge is still urgent and should not be denied by ostriches claiming that the complexity and dynamics of health care do not leave room for standards. I can recommend this book to everyone who is interested in the subject.

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