

# Review of: "Relevance of Medical Ethics in Public Health: Case Study of Polio Eradication"

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This paper is exciting reading addressing an ongoing breach of medical ethics in the global campaign for eradication of polio. "Ongoing" due to the fact that even though WHO's recommendation now includes IPV combined with an improved OPV, there is no force applied to secure sufficient access to IPV world-wide.

The authors take us through the modern history of public health polio strategy. Possibly they might have used some words to elaborate why the faecal-oral transmission theory has to be refuted and how the effect of OPV on the epidemiology can be evaluated. Also the authors might consider using a less provocative language a few places ("the trial masquerading as public health." "We suspected some hidden reason..."). But I fully agree in the conclusions implied! WHO is an important global agency that we cannot live without, but it cannot be its own watchdog! They conclude that "all country level public health projects that distribute pharmaceutical products should have a mandatory ethics review." Will this solve the problem? Reading their excellent account of the history of the polio campaign, I think that very little of the calamities would have been avoided by a pre-trial review. Only an independent body following the development of this (and other campaigns) might help. Also there is "an elephant in the room" invisibly present in the final stage of all eradication campaigns. We have historical experience only from the smallpox eradication: More people died or suffered severe AEFI from the vaccine than from the wild virus. The authors are right that for polio the big difference is that there is an alternative to OPV, but if we were in a situation like for smallpox, with no alternative strategy, the simple axioms of medical ethics would prevent us from taking the last step towards eradication.