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“Bioethics is not exactly what is commonly understood as science ...”

(summary)

V.I. Kharitonova interviews B.G. Yudin

Information:



Boris Grigorievich YUDIN, a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (hereafter RAS), professor, Doctor of Philosophy, head of the dept. of Complex problems of human studies of the Institute of Philosophy of RAS, head of the Center of bioethics of the Institute of humanities of the Moscow State University, editor-in-chief of the RAS Presidium journal “Chelovek”

(“Man”), responds to the questions of Valentina Kharitonova, editor-in-chief of the “Medical Anthropology and Bioethics” journal. Professor Yudin is the author of more than 400 works in different fields of science, including methodology of complex studies of man and bioethics.

Boris Yudin is one of the founders of bioethics as a scientific field and public activities in Russia. Since 1992 he is a vice-president of the Russian National Committee on Bioethics; since 1998 – the Russian representative on the Steering Committee on Bioethics, Council of Europe (CDBI), where in 2000-04 he was a member of the Bureau of this Committee. From 1999 to 2007 Professor Yudin was a member of the Board of Directors of the International Association of Bioethics.



Key words: bioethics, ethical committees, ethical review, problem of justice, new technologies, informed consent, bioethical position of the church, experiments on human subjects, Bioethical forum

Abstract: The interview with B.G. Yudin, one of the founders of Russian bioethics, was concentrated first of all on scientific and applied issues. He discussed the principle of informed consent and informed choice stressing possibility of their embodiment in Russian reality; peculiarities of ethical review and functioning of ethical committees of different levels, difficulties in their work, possibilities of publishing review results. He talked about the issues involved in conducting clinical trials, especially international research sponsored from abroad. B.G. Yudin noted that a group of researchers have prepared a draft bill on clinical trials that was evaluated by the State Duma but never accepted. He underlined that now in Russia the only social institute having a clear standpoint on bioethical issues is the Russian Orthodox Church.

During the course of the conversation an emphasis was put on the scientific aspect of bioethics. Boris Yudin talked about specifics of bioethics establishment in Russia. He thinks that bioethics is a specific science closely intermingled with public activities, which can be regarded as the main feature of the 21st century science. Professor Yudin traces the formation of bioethics to the foundation of the 1st ethical committee in one of the clinics of Seattle (Washington), where dialysis was introduced for the first time.

Issues of informed consent and informed choice, and their present embedding into the Russian public health service were discussed, as well as an idea of openness of medical care which clashes with an almost “sacral” attitude toward physicians’ knowledge. The discussants also raised the question of ethical committees and their work, and a problem of involvement of bioethics experts into a solution of bioethical situations. All the mentioned topics have been discussed on the basis of available data on bioethics in Russia, USA, Europe, and some other countries.



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Professor Yudin underlined that in the Russian Federation it is only the Russian Orthodox Church that has currently its own clear position on bioethics.

In Yudin's opinion, the most daunting problems in bioethical practice in Russia are the issues of social justice; a possibility to manipulate research and assessment of pharmaceutical drugs; bureaucratic obstacles in embedding bioethics in Russia, including difficulties in adoption of a law on biomedical trials.

Speaking about the journal's tasks, professor Yudin paid special attention to the necessity to solve ethical problems by taking into account that every culture has its own specific features and that the same norms are being understood differently in different cultures.