


## Chapter 7

# Reconfiguring Responsibility in International Clinical Trials: A Multicultural Approach

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter aims to prominently position the African philosophical notion of the self within the clinical trials context (and the larger bioethics project). As opposed to autonomy-based principlism, this other-regarding or communalist perspective is proposed as the preferred alternative model. The intent is to draw further attention to the inadequacy of the principlist approach particularly in multicultural settings. It also engenders a rethink, stimulates interest, and re-assesses the failed assumptions of universal ethical principles. As a novel attempt that runs against much of the prevailing (Euro-American) intellectual mood, this approach strives to introduce the African viewpoint by making explicit the import of the self in a re-contextualized (nay, globalized) arena. Viewed as such, research ethics is guided to go beyond autonomy-based considerations for the individual with absolute right to self-determination; to embrace more holistic-based approach, recognizing that the individual is embedded in his/her family, community, and the environment.*

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## INTRODUCTION

It is not difficult to cite examples of how original African philosophical ideas have set the foundation for aspects of modern life. For instance, the University of Timbuktu in ancient Mali led the world in high-level formal research education. Fast forward to today, where collaborative research, interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, and co- or joint-disciplinarity are terms of note. Collaborative research and/or interdisciplinarity are undergirding the philosophy embedded in the 2003 National Institutes of Health (NIH) Roadmap's concept of One Health. The Roadmap aims to provide compelling priorities that are essential in accelerating progress across the spectrum of the biomedical research fronts (Zerhouni, 2003). Collaborative research also underpins the community-based participatory research (CBPR) model. This model focuses on relationships between academic and community partners, including principles of co-learning, mutual respect, and mutual benefit.

One can argue that the 2003 NIH Roadmap and CBPR are no different or in fact derive directly from the African philosophical model that this chapter will refer to as bio-eco-communalism (BEC). It is an *anyi b'ofu'* or *ubuntu* (we-are-one) mantra with a holistic approach. For instance, as a social construct, BEC describes the immersion and inseparability of the individual within his/her family, community, and the surrounding environment (both material and metaphysical). By implication, current biomedical research directions seem to at last succumb to the fact that, really *everything is connected*. Even the technology industry has borrowed this philosophical thinking to introduce free and open-source software developed in the United Kingdom and named after the African philosophy of ubuntu, which translates to "humanity to others" or "I am who I am because of who we all are" (Iyioke, 2018).

The present analysis of a multicultural approach to clinical trials is borne out of interests that interlink bioethics, multiculturalism, environmental, and global studies. This is exemplified in the attempt to string together seemingly disparate subject matters like responsibility, clinical trials, and selfhood (African notion of it)<sup>1</sup> to make them cohere.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to prominently position the African philosophical ideas as bases for some of the emerging research directions. The notion of personhood within the clinical trials context (and the larger bioethics project) seems like an apt example. As opposed to the Euro-American autonomy-based principlism in research ethics, this analysis will propose an "other-regarding" or communalist<sup>3</sup> perspective as the preferred alternative model. Hence, this chapter attempts to explore the ethics of public health, specifically, responsibility in clinical trials. It reconceptualizes responsibility in clinical trials with the insight of the African understanding of the human person. By inference, it strives to complement scholarly literature dealing with cross-cultural biomedical research ethics. It emphasizes the African perspective,

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