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THE INFORMED CONSENT NOT TO BE INFORMED - A CROSS SECTIONAL SURVEY ON THE USE OF PLACEBO IN CLINICAL PRACTICE

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Introduction: Current clinical practice excludes placebo usage on ethical grounds. No attempt was made to clarify the viewpoint of the general population regarding the matter.

Objective: To evaluate the opinion of young-adults towards the use of Placebo in clinical practice.

Aim:

- 1) Investigate the willingness of our study population to receive placebo for the treatment of depression or other general medical conditions, and
- 2) assess whether prescribing placebo would affect the study population's view regarding doctor-patient relationship or patient's autonomy.

Method: We enrolled 344 students from five academic institutes in Israel, and briefed them thoroughly about the effects of placebo, its efficacy and limitations in treating depression.

Understanding was verified and only then did the subjects complete a 32 item self-report questionnaire (include sociodemographic, health related data, past experience in medical encounters and willingness of subjects to be treated with Placebo medication).

Results: In contrast to our main hypothesis 70% (N=243) of the subjects expressed consent to be treated with placebo as a first line treatment had they suffered from depression, and 73% (N=248) agreed to receive placebo for other general medical conditions. Eighty-eight percent of the subjects (N=297) did not perceive a physician using placebo as a deceiver or the act of prescribing it a deceit.

Conclusions: The majority of our study population was willing to use placebo medication in general, and in particular, as first line treatment for depression. This study results should promote physicians to rethink and discuss the legitimacy of using placebo in clinical practice.