

People don't understand medical research

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U.S. scientists said too many research participants don't understand the differences between medical research and medical treatment.

The researchers -- writing in a policy paper in this week's issue of PLoS Medicine -- said that failure is called "therapeutic misconception." They said some trial participants, for example, might not be aware of the implications of being randomly assigned to a new treatment versus a control treatment -- instead, they might falsely believe they're being assigned to a medication based on what is best for them personally.

The researchers, led by Gail Henderson at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, said despite considerable empirical research on therapeutic misconception since the early 1980s, a consistent definition of therapeutic misconception hasn't emerged in the literature.

"Without such a definition," they wrote, "meaningful empirical work to measure and assess the prevalence of therapeutic misconception, or to test interventions to reduce it, is difficult to conduct."

The policy paper is also discussed in this month's PLoS Medicine editorial on the boundary between clinical care and medical research.

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