Is informed consent threatening biobank research?

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Having to obtain informed consent for the use of left-over human tissue samples could be hampering essential biobank research says a research group on BMJ.com today.

Joanna Stjernschantz Forsberg and colleagues at Uppsala University in Sweden, argue that the requirement for informed consent for biobank research is problematic for two main reasons. First, it consumes resources that could be directed towards more research or healthcare, and second, it imposes a risk of selection bias.

According to the authors, research projects are abandoned because informed consent is deemed "too logistically difficult" to obtain. They also say the accuracy of research results could be adversely affected by the need to obtain consent. They explain that this is because "there are significant differences between individuals who consent to participating in biobank research and those who do not."

They argue that a way forward would be to adopt polices of broad, presumed or no consent for research on leftover human tissue material. However, they say even the least controversial of these proposals - broad consent - has been criticised because it threatens patient autonomy.

The authors believe that the time has come for individuals to acknowledge that, in order to further their own interests, they must sometimes accept inclusion in common endeavours. They say that "as individuals living together in a society we limit our freedom in many

ways in order to achieve common goals."

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