



Pharmaceutical Research, Democracy and Conspiracy: International Clinical Trials in Local Medical Institutions

Edison Bicudo

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Clinical trials used to be conducted overwhelmingly in the US and Europe but for a range of economic, technical and ethical reasons, the number of multicentre studies recruiting subjects in different regions of the World has grown exponentially. New medicines are tested in vast research networks involving several countries, hospitals and other medical institutions, and hundreds of individual subjects.

In Pharmaceutical Research, Democracy and Conspiracy, Edison Bicudo examines the connections between global and local scales, exploring how it is possible for social actors as different as global companies and patients of local hospitals to come together and establish social relationships that may last many years. He also identifies the implications of these global-local relationships for the financial, technical and cultural structures of the participating hospitals. His study draws on fieldwork conducted in five countries: the UK, Spain, France, Brazil and South Africa.

Shining a light on the social mediations that enable the encounter between these rationalities, the author concludes that this has the practical effect of subjecting countries hosting trials to institutional engineering. Hospitals and research agencies create new, sometimes surprising, institutional arrangements to cope with international research projects, which change relations between physicians and patients, as they acquire new roles as clinical investigators and research subjects. Frequently, such shifts deviate the institutional structures of medical institutions away from democratic, and towards conspiratorial, schemes.

The book reviews the concept of mediation in sociological thought, proposes further developments in Habermas' theory of communicative action, and offers some political reflection about the role of institutions in contemporary democracies.



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