

News Release

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Expert Commentary:

Leading Penn Bioethicist Challenges Scientists to Lead the Public in Moral Conversations about Their Work

Failure To Do So May Result in Misunderstandings and Missed Opportunities

(Philadelphia, PA) -- In the first-ever article on bioethics to appear in *Cell*, one of the nation's leading bioethicists challenges scientists to proactively engage the public in discussions about the value and significance of their research protocols ... to maintain an ethical base, at all times, in the conduct of their own research ... and to help advance scientific knowledge among the public and their colleagues by freely sharing new and relevant information.

In a special "Commentary" penned exclusively for the journal *Cell*, **Paul Root Wolpe, PhD**, of the Center for Bioethics and Department of Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, identifies the eight top reasons scientists cite to avoid thinking about ethics ... and then offers substantive responses to invalidate the scientists' excuses. Four of the eight reasons cited include: "I'm Not Trained in Ethics," "My...Work has Little to Do With Ethics," "Ethics is Arbitrary," and "Others will Make the Ethical Decisions." According to Wolpe, "Science is a powerful force for change in modern society. As the professionals at its helm, scientists have a unique responsibility to shepherd that change with thoughtful advocacy of their research and careful ethical scrutiny of their own behavior."

Wolpe argues that by becoming effective advocates for their work, scientists not only advance their own research pursuits but also the public's understanding and acceptance of various forms of inquiries. He notes that "the cloning of Dolly has become the exemplar of the failure to prepare the public for a scientific breakthrough...Had the ethical discussion kept pace with the research, the global hyperventilation over Dolly might well not have taken place."

If scientists continue to find reasons to not engage the public in a discussion of their activities, the public will find ways to scrutinize their behavior - "...and the results," cautions Wolpe, "may not always be in the best interests of science or society."

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Penn's School of Medicine is ranked #2 in the nation for receipt of NIH research funds; and ranked #3 in the nation in U.S.News & World Report's most recent ranking of top research-oriented medical schools. Supporting 1,400 fulltime faculty and 700 students, the School of Medicine is recognized worldwide for its superior education and training of the next generation of physician-scientists and leaders of academic medicine.

The University of Pennsylvania Health System includes three hospitals [Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, which is consistently ranked one of the nation's few "Honor Roll" hospitals by U.S.News & World Report; Pennsylvania Hospital, the nation's first hospital; and Penn Presbyterian Medical Center]; a faculty practice plan; a primary-care provider network; two multispecialty satellite facilities; and home care and hospice.

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