



University
of Basel

Department of
Biomedical Engineering



Selected research topics in Biomedical Engineering:

Quantifying Placebo Effects: Problems and Limitations

Location: University Campus Basel, Pharmazentrum, Sitzungszimmer 1067

Date & Time: Tuesday 16.05.2023 10:15 – 12:00

The Lies of Lies: Exploring the Ethics of Open-Label Prescription

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Abstract

We are told from a very young age that lying is unethical. We live our whole lives believing this and on the whole try to avoid lying whenever possible. However, the placebo effect presents us with a challenge. There is evidence that placebos are clinically helpful, maybe even therapeutic. Yet the very term placebo points to a mistruth, an action/intervention that is itself ineffective, but this ineffectiveness is unknown to its object. In the past, prescribing placebos to patients was considered unethical. It implied a mistruth that could undermine trust, damage doctor-patient relationships, and bring the health care profession into disrepute. Yet in practice prescribing placebos was considered a 'grey zone', with health care professionals sometimes writing placebo prescriptions to satisfy the needs of bothersome patients. Recently research has demonstrated that placebo-prescribing may be acceptable in certain cases, and even beneficial. Attention has therefore been turned to open-label prescribing. There is evidence of some health benefits, but we are not entirely sure about the therapeutic pathways. The question then becomes: What exactly are we lying about? Is it still a placebo if it works? Should we be completely open with our patients about open-label prescriptions? Or is the current grey-zone a better approach?

This interactive presentation will present the ethics and challenges of the placebo effect from a normative standpoint. Exploring with participants, in a fun and challenging way, the lies of lies.