

Call for Papers: The Ethics of Experimental Deep Brain Stimulation – Future Directions

Deep brain stimulation (DBS) is a neurosurgical procedure that has been widely used to ameliorate motor symptoms associated with neurological conditions such as Parkinson's disease. Following its success in this regard, DBS is also increasingly being considered as an experimental treatment modality for a range of disorders. Although DBS holds a great deal of promise as an experimental treatment, the intervention also raises a number of ethical and legal questions. In particular, some ethicists have raised the concern that DBS may change a patient's personality or threaten their autonomous agency. Indeed, this concern has generated a great deal of attention in the neuroethical literature, with some commentators suggesting that the discussion has developed into a bubble that needs to be deflated.

But there are other important ethical and legal questions raised by experimental DBS: What kinds of conditions should DBS target? How can we ensure that experimental DBS trial designs strike the right balance between protecting patients and obtaining good quality evidence? How should psychiatric applications of DBS be regulated? Is DBS morally equivalent to ablative neurosurgical procedures in psychiatry? How can we best investigate the patient experience of DBS treatment, and develop better tools for adequately capturing the changes that patients describe in qualitative interviews?

A 2 day workshop, funded by the Wellcome Trust and hosted by The Oxford Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, will be held on the 15th -16th January at The University of Oxford to bring together experts from neurosurgery, psychiatry, philosophy and law to discuss the questions raised by experimental DBS. Confirmed speakers include:

Prof. Tipu Aziz (University of Oxford – Head of Functional Neurosurgery)

Prof. Rebecca Park (University of Oxford – Department of Psychiatry)

Prof Jennifer Chandler (University of Ottawa – Faculty of Law)

Dr. Frederic Gilbert (University of Tasmania – Faculty of Philosophy).

We invite the submission of abstracts of no more than 250 words for papers addressing ethical or legal questions raised by experimental Deep Brain Stimulation. The deadline for submission is October 18th. Decisions on accepted abstracts will be provided by 31st October. Please send abstract submissions to jonathan.pugh@philosophy.ox.ac.uk.

