

## Miss Evers' Boys

Thursday, 8 February 2007

3:00pm - 5:00pm

Morgan Stanley Children's Hospital South  
McIntosh Conference Room  
3959 Broadway [at 165th Street]

Harriet Washington, author of *Medical Apartheid*, Discussant;  
Ruth Fischbach, PhD, MPE, Director, Columbia University Center for Bioethics, Facilitator

### **This event was part of the Columbia University Medical Center Institutional Review Board (IRB) Discussion Series and was co-sponsored by the Center for Bioethics**

The Columbia University Medical Center Institutional Review Board presented, in co-sponsorship with the Columbia University Center for Bioethics, a videotaped presentation of David Feldshuh's docudrama, *Miss Evers' Boys*, followed by a discussion.

Ruth Fischbach, PhD, MPE, Director of the Columbia University Center for Bioethics, introduced the reading and served as moderator. Harriet Washington, the author of *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present*, led a vigorous, full, and frank question and answer period and discussion afterward.

Originally presented as a concert reading at Harvard Medical School, *Miss Evers' Boys* is a dramatization of one of the most egregious episodes in the history of federally-supported research. In 1932, in Macon County, Alabama, the US Public Health Service launched the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male. Designed as a natural history study, the endpoint was to follow the men to autopsy. Told they had "bad blood," a cadre of 411 men -- poor and mostly illiterate African-American sharecroppers -- was recruited into the study. From 1932 to 1972 they were followed, never told of their correct diagnosis nor provided with informed consent, all the while being deceived into thinking that the medical tests they endured, including spinal taps, were treatment. In 1946, with the advent of penicillin, the trial took a more sinister turn when the men were denied this highly effective treatment. The study, which was never kept secret, became notorious in 1972 when facts of the study were revealed in the press. Senate hearings were subsequently held which ultimately led to 45CFR46 and the Belmont Report, both designed to protect participants in clinical trials. The now infamous Tuskegee Trial, called a tragedy of race and medicine, has become a metaphor for unethical research which has added to the distrust of research by African-Americans.

The Columbia University Medical Center Institutional Review Board Discussion Series presents monthly sessions that are open to the research community and involve presentation of a research-related movie, article, or book, followed by discussion. The objective of these sessions is to foster relationships among individuals involved in the research enterprise, in an informal environment, and to explore pertinent ethical, historical, and regulatory issues.