The Therapeutic Misconception at 25: Treatment, Research, and Confusion.
*Hastings Centre Report* 2007; 6: 36-42

**Abstract**
In recent years, the concept of the “therapeutic misconception” has been increasingly visible in bioethical debates. Defined twenty-five years ago as the failure of research subjects to appreciate the ways that study procedures interfere with individualized care, numerous commentators have extended the concept from randomized controlled trials to other research settings. Though the widened influence and conceptual extensions have often had a positive effect on human research protections, they reveal continuing tensions concerning the boundary between research and care. Below, I critique three aspects of the term’s extension: its definition, subject, and consequences.

**The Growth and Evolution of the TM as a Bioethical Concept**

The *Hastings Center Report* article originally contained some data that graphically show how interest in the therapeutic misconception has grown in the last decade. The graph below, edited from the final published article, graphically demonstrates the sudden revival of the concept around 2000.

![Figure 1: Publications using "Therapeutic Misconception:' PubMed search using "Therapeutic Misconception" was conducted November 10, 2005. All article types are included.](image)

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The next graph also examines how Appelbaum et al’s 1987 paper in *Hastings Center Report* has been cited. I used ISI Web of Science to identify citations to the original article (search performed January 25, 2007). A few words of caution in interpreting this graph: part of the increase might reflect 1- a general expansion in the volume of bioethics publications through the same time period, and/or 2- greater inclusion of bioethics publications in the ISI database through the time period.

**Figure 2:** Yearly volume of articles citing the article which introduced the “therapeutic misconception” to the wider community.
This last graph shows that the term has been taken up primarily by North American bioethics. It is based on the same ISI Web of Science search as above; results were sorted by country of author. A word of caution in interpreting this chart: part of the trend may also reflect 1- the greater overall volume of published bioethics articles in U.S. venues, and/or 2- the fact that ISI Web of Science, a U.S.-based service, is biased towards U.S. and English-language publications.

Figure 3: Country from which citation of Appelbaum et al 1987 originates.