

TESTIMONY ON MEDICAL EXPERIMENTATION IN HOLMESBURG PRISON
PRESENTED BY WILLIAM HARPER
BEFORE THE PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE'S
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIMES AND CORRECTIONS

My name is William Harper. I live at 1828 West Thompson, Philadelphia, PA. I am 63 years old. I was in Holmesburg Prison between 1964 and 1967. During this time I participated in one study and worked in the dermatology lab for the University of Pennsylvania.

I never participated in a University of Pennsylvania experiment as the subject until near the end of my stay in prison in 1967. I was in contact with the studies before that time because I worked in the dermatology laboratory. I had never had any medical training before I started working in the dermatology laboratory in the prison for the University of Pennsylvania; I only had a high school diploma.

I was trained to work in the dermatology laboratory for the by other inmates, Charlie Frye and Benny Trimel, who had already been working there. We were the three guys who worked in the dermatology laboratory and Solomon McBride was our director. I learned to make solutions and ointments, to occlude and area for a blister, to punch a biopsy suture, to take blood, to use the autoclave, an incubator, and the metric system. We were only told a certain protocol to follow -- we weren't told what they

did with the results or what they were looking for in the study. We only knew our part of the study.

In the laboratory we did dandruff studies, blister studies, elliptical and punch biopsies, and injections. We would use zolocaine to anesthetize the area that we were going to use. I collected cerebrum levels from people's heads. We did radiation studies and did Geiger counting off of people. There were creams that weren't labeled by name -- only by code numbers. We helped administer sweat studies and do skin scrapings. Sometimes for studies we used drugs like DMSO and SLS on guys. I became what I call a blister expert. As I did these things there was not a doctor present. The prison doctor knew what was going on and he didn't interfere with the experiments unless there was an emergency.

After we had done the experiments we were told to print out the results and send them to Dr. Kligman or to the director - Mr. McBride. We also did the billing for the study.

When I began working for the University of Pennsylvania dermatology laboratory in Holmesburg Prison I was getting paid \$25.00 per month. I got raises as I continued working there and when I left I was getting paid almost \$100.00 a month. At the time I left I had been working at the dermatology laboratories for 16 months and I was head technician. The money from working

in the laboratories was the only money I received at that time, except if a relative or friend sent me a little bit of money in the mail.

I did get some special treatment because of working at this job. I didn't have to stay locked up in my cell all day. The prison officials didn't bother me because I worked for the University of Pennsylvania. We -- the laboratory workers -- were trusted and they seldom searched what we were doing. Somebody else did our laundry and we could arrange to get swags so that I didn't have to eat prison food all the time. Swags were food -- usually hot sandwiches, but sometimes other things such as steaks, pork chops, or eggs -- and because we had a hotplate and other things like that in the laboratory we could make our own food. Guys would bring me this food for keeping them on the experiments. I remember that at the time everybody wanted to be on the H-block for the experiments; it was the place to be.

The job working with the University of Pennsylvania consumed my time. I spent my free time trying to read up on medical information. I tried to learn all of the words and the protocol. I thought it was an opportunity to do something worthwhile. I know now that I was misled during that time. Even though I worked in the dermatology laboratory for over a year I didn't gain any skills that would have helped me outside of the prison.

Also, since I've seen the other former inmates who were suffering because of the experiments they participated in, I realize I did something wrong. I realize now that I looked the other way, so to speak, during the studies because they didn't directly affect me.

In 1967 when I was no longer working in the dermatology lab I was a subject in a University of Pennsylvania study where they transplanted my skin. Before they did the transplant they told me that they were going to do a biopsy transplant. I had to sign a paper of release saying I knew what I was doing and that I was consenting to the test. That paper had to be signed every time a test was conducted. They explained part of what they were going to do to me, but they never explained what effects this could have on me before I signed the form. I also wasn't very capable of understanding what they were explaining because I didn't know the medical terms they used. There was never any follow up to this test.

Mr. Popper from the University of Pennsylvania administered the transplant experiment I participated in; he was Dr. Kligman's brother-in-law. He put part of my lip on my arm and part of my arm on my lip. After the transplants, where my lip had been put on my arm it would chafe and sometimes it would swell. I thought they would eventually take it out. They never did however, and

even today I still have part of my lip on my arm. At the time I felt that it was a simple sacrifice. I was told I'd get one hundred dollars and I wanted to use that money to support my needs. I also wanted to be able to afford a lawyer. Now I realize participating in the experiment was a stupid thing to do.

I would like to see some compensation for the people who were hurt. This case is about the others really, not about me. I feel bad about what happened in the studies at the prisons and I have had to come to grips with my role in it. I feel like I was part of the problem because I helped do the experiments. I would like to think I have learned something from this whole experience.