

# Those famous red pills—Deliberations and hesitations. Ethics of placebo use in therapeutic and research settings

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## Abstract

Placebo fascinates and mystifies. Even with today's medical science we still do not know how and if it works. The use of placebo both in therapy and in research evokes ethical problems that are not easily resolved either. Placebo is intrinsically linked to deception, while veracity is a basic tenet in today's thinking of a doctor–patient relationship. In research ethics placebo, though considered the golden control condition, leads to the question of the therapeutic obligation. This narrative review presents an overview of these ethical questions and offers considerations that are of relevance to daily medical and research practice both in psychiatry and elsewhere.

**Keywords:** Placebo; Psychiatry; Research; Ethics; Informed consent; Doctor–patient relationship