

me. The areas of my body that were better covered looked and felt no different from the areas that were not as well covered, and the suffering that went along with the suit turned out to be all that it provided me.

You see, while it would be morally questionable to make patients in the burn department take part in an experiment that was designed to test the efficacy of such suits (using different types of fabrics, different pressure levels, etc.), and even more difficult to ask someone to participate in a placebo experiment, it is also morally difficult to inflict painful treatments on many patients and for many years, without having a really good reason to do so.

If this type of synthetic suit had been tested relative to other methods, and relative to a placebo suit, that approach might have eliminated part of my daily misery. It might also have stimulated research on new approaches—ones that would actually work. My wasted suffering, and the suffering of other patients like me, is the real cost of not doing such experiments.

Should we always test every procedure and carry out placebo experiments? The moral dilemmas involved in medical and placebo experiments are real. The potential benefits of such experiments should be weighed against their costs, and as a consequence we cannot, and should not, always do placebo tests. But my feeling is that we are not doing nearly as many of them as we should.