

Compassionate objectivity. Lay understandings of what counts as effective treatment in stem cell therapies.

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In Italy there is an ongoing heated public debate on an unproven and controversial stem-cell therapy issued in a public hospital. The therapy – developed by a private non-medical company named Stamina Foundation – was administered on a compassionate basis, by exploiting the Italian law which authorizes the use of as-yet-unapproved therapies for treating dying patients. Italian medical authorities have repeatedly stopped this unproven therapy, because it does not respect the quality and safety standards requested by the Italian and EU regulations, and it lacks proofs of therapeutic efficacy. But the debate is far from being concluded, because strong public and media pressures and patients' demonstrations to authorize use of the Stamina therapy; and decisions of various courts, which ruled the right of patients to Stamina therapy on a compassionate basis.

My research explores this debate, and it focuses on the diverging understandings of what counts as therapeutic effectiveness between critics and supporters of Stamina therapy, and between scientists and lay citizens.

The analysis is carried out on public statements made by scientists, governmental authorities, patients' organizations and lay citizens involved in the debate, retrieved on mass media, social networks and web pages. The aim is to explore how the growing engagement of patients and citizens in biomedicine involves the emergence of a contending definition of objectivity, which claims the centrality of patients' judgements against the classical methods used in biomedicine, and thus how it affects the politics of state-financed medical trials.