

Steve Rodriguez

Week 3 Assignment

Peter Buxton: Whistleblower or Hero?

Peter Buxton is a former employee of the U.S. Public Health Service. Peter was labeled as a whistleblower because he steadily fought until he ended the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment. His talk is entitled, "Marked Men: In Case You Didn't Know About Tuskegee" (<https://bioethics.jhu.edu> 2018). Peter was only 27 years of age and held the titles of social worker and epidemiologist in San Francisco. He was hired by the Public Health Service in December 1965 to interview patients with sexually transmitted diseases. While performing his duties, he heard about the Tuskegee Experiment from co-workers. Peter had difficulty believing what he had heard, since this awful rumor was incriminating the Public Health Service and he couldn't understand how a reputable organization would engage in such inhumane activities. In November 1966, Peter decided to file an official protest on ethical grounds with the Service's Division of Venereal Diseases. The report was rejected on the grounds that the experiment was still in process. When the experiment was completed, he filed another protest in November 1968 and again his concerns were found to be inconsequential. This shows how some unethical activity can take place and even if it's officially reported, the official report might be unsubstantiated for whatever reason that may seem fit.

In 1972 Peter insisted in volunteering this unbelievable information on the Tuskegee Experiment to the Washington State. The Experiment was finally exposed and published on July 25, 1972. It became front-page news in the New York Times the

very next day. “Senator Edward Kennedy called Congressional hearings, at which Buxtun and HEW officials testified and the Experiment was terminated shortly thereafter” (<https://bioethics.jhu.edu> 2018). Had Peter not continued insisting in making this outrage public, the U.S. Public Health Service would have gotten away with continuing this terrible act of endangering Africa American lives for the sake of an experiment.

I personally think Peter Buxtun did the absolute “right thing” in repeatedly reporting the Tuskegee Experiment and ultimately managing to end it. The Public Health Service was using strategic lies in order to experiment on six hundred innocent men who were completely unaware of the damage this Experiment would cause them and their off-springs. “Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male,” launched during the Great Depression. They were told they had “bad blood,” and many underwent painful spinal taps and other medical procedures. Of those 600 men, 399 had syphilis (<https://news.stanford.edu/2017>).

Sadly, researchers have found that the disclosure of the Tuskegee syphilis study is tied-in with increases in medical mistrust and mortality among African-American men. It is unfortunate that experiments like this have been freely performed on human beings. This magnitude of disrespect for people should be unacceptable and punished with the full extent of the law. I applaud Peter Buxtun for standing up and advocating to protect the rights of African American men. As Kelly Richmond Pope mentions in the video “Why do we hate whistle-blowers?” many would have looked away in fear of being fired or demoted, but Peter was courageous and did what he knew was morally correct and

didn't give up until he saw justice served. Peter Buxtun is indeed, a hero and has proven to possess outstanding work ethics.