Friendlier regulations fuel China’s lead in human gene-editing race

In a hospital west of Shanghai, Wu Shixiu since March has been trying to treat cancer patients using a promising new gene-editing tool.

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In a quirk of the globalized technology arena, Dr. Wu can forge ahead with the tool because he faces few regulatory hurdles to testing it on humans. His hospital’s review board took just an afternoon to sign off on his trial. He didn’t need national regulators’ approval and has few reporting requirements.

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In contrast, what’s expected to be the first human Crispr trial outside China has yet to begin. The University of Pennsylvania has spent nearly two years addressing federal and other requirements, including numerous safety checks designed to minimize risks to patients.

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China’s foray into human Crispr trials has some Western scientists concerned about the unintended consequences of using the wholly new tool—such as harm to patients—which could set back the field for everyone.

Western scientists the Journal interviewed didn’t suggest America’s stringent requirements should be weakened. Instead, many advocate an international consensus on ethical issues around a science that makes fundamental changes to human DNA yet still isn’t completely understood.

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None of the Chinese trials has published results. While Dr. Wu and other doctors say some patients’ conditions improved, at least 15 of the known 86 patients have died of what doctors in the trials say were their diseases.

Read full, original post (paywall): China, Unhampered by Rules, Races Ahead in Gene-Editing Trials