

Murderous Medicine: Nazi Doctors, Human Experimentation, and Typhus

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More than 1.5 million concentration camp prisoners died of typhus, a preventable disease. Despite advances in public health measures to control and prevent typhus outbreaks, German doctors, fueled by their racist ideology and their medieval approach to the disease, used the disease as a form of biological warfare against Jews, Slavs, and gypsies. Jewish hospitals in ghettos were burned—along with patients and staff—if typhus was present. In concentration camps, even suspected typhus cases were killed in the gas chambers or through intracardiac injections. Typhus vaccines were tested on prisoners deliberately infected with typhus. Only a handful of doctors were ever prosecuted for their crimes.

Against all odds, Jewish health providers struggled to avoid the worst through innovative steps to save lives. Despite the removal of their equipment, drugs, and other resources, they organized health care and sanitary hygienic measures. Doctors were forced to conceal cases, falsify diagnoses and cause of death in order to save lives. This important study explores the role of the International Red Cross in typhus epidemics during and after World War I and World War II. It details the widespread complicity of foreign companies in the Nazi typhus research. Finally, the author stresses the importance of monitoring and holding accountable the medical profession, researchers, and drug companies that continue to invest in research on biological agents as weapons of war.

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