

An interaction of medical and statistical ethics

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Abstract

The twentieth century brought great advances in the widespread adoption of sound biometric techniques for interpretation of biological data,. Yet even today a statistician can still be surprised by finding official support given to procedures that, despite intuitive appeal, have no sound logical basis. Thromboplastin , an important agent in the assessment of the speed of blood coagulation, .is a material derived from animal tissue. Now a widely used aid to clinical haematology, each new batch requires to be calibrated against a recognized standard. This process takes the form of a routine experiment of simple design. WHO has published detailed instructions for analysis of the data that have become the accepted procedure for estimating the needed calibration factor, but that incorporate a dogmatic rule for removal of outlying observations. Having almost by chance earlier become involved in some clarification of the underlying linear model, I feel concern for the possible consequences of the WHO-recommended analysis. I hope to interest this meeting in the role of statisticians in ethical issues that may affect patient care and clinical practice.

References

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