

Episode: *Author Interview: “Lessons for Responsible Geroscience From the History of Longevity”*

Guest: Nicolai Wohns, MD

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I'm your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Nicolai Wohns, a physician and doctoral candidate in philosophy at the University of Washington in Seattle. He's here to discuss his article, coauthored with Dr Daniel Promislow, “*Lessons for Responsible Geroscience From the History of Longevity*,” in the December 2025 issue of the Journal, [Aging Is Bad for You?](#) Dr Wohns, thank you so much for being here. [theme music fades]

DR NICOLAI WOHNS: It's a pleasure to be here. Thanks.

[00:00:45] HOFF: So, what is the main ethics point that you and your coauthor are making in this article?

WOHNS: So, yeah. So the main point is, well, so Daniel and I have a shared interest in thinking through the wide, wider social, economic, political implications of gerotherapies, drugs that potentially slow aging. And so, this article's about the importance of those social, structural, economic even, context to human longevity and how this fits with potential gerotherapies. And one way of parsing that is looking to the past. And so, we looked to the past for lessons about the present and future. And the main point was really that while it is truly, genuinely exciting to think about these new drugs, we can't forget that longevity is socially situated. It draws heavily from wider social and structural factors. And so, if the wider context in contributing factors are forgotten, then we'll really have an incomplete or insufficient framework for maintaining the impressive gains in longevity we've seen over the last hundred years. And we review some of what's gone into that and give specific advice to not only researchers but clinicians about thinking about the future.

[00:02:15] HOFF: And so, what's the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to be taking from this issue?

WOHNS: I think in light of looking at what's led to the past incredible gains we've made in lifespan, it puts the focus on, really, public health as one of the main drivers. And so, I tell students and trainees that even though it's exciting to think of technological solutions in the form of these drugs, it's something to remember the context and not to forget sort

of the social-economic context in which we talk about aging, in which these narratives are spun.

[00:03:07] HOFF: And finally, if you could add something to this article that you didn't have the time or the space to fully explore, what would that be?

WOHNS: I think one of the main things—and we talk about this at the end of the article—but I think one of the main takeaways, or at least the next steps, is that we would really like to see frank face-to-face conversations between biologists doing the research and ethicists thinking about it, along with demographers and economists and clinicians and health care administrators even to have a broader conversation about what our aims should be and also to preempt potentially profound alterations to our society. [theme music returns] And so, we really think that's an important next step that follows from this article.

[00:04:09] HOFF: Dr Wohns, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today, and thanks to you and your coauthor for your contribution to the Journal this month.

WOHNS: It's our pleasure. Thank you.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, [journalofethics.org](http://journalofethics.org).