

Leaning From Failed Experiments

In the past, medical journals, pharmaceutical companies and researchers themselves have been criticized for publishing selectively only their positive results, that is to say, the results that they wanted to find. This is important because accentuation of the positive can easily mislead the medical profession into believing that a certain drug or treatment is much more effective than it really is.

On reading the *New England Journal of Medicine* and other medical journals, I sometimes wonder whether the pendulum has swung too far in the other direction, in accentuating the negative. To read of so many bright ideas that did not work could act as a discouragement to others and even lead to that permanent temptation of ageing doctors, therapeutic nihilism. But the truth is the truth, and we must follow it wherever it leads.

A recent edition of the *NEJM*, for example, reported on three trials, two with negative results and one with mildly positive ones. The trials involved the [the prophylaxis of HIV injection](#), and the treatment of [PJ Media](#).