The “Quo Vadis?” feature will allow young scientists (40 years of age and younger) the opportunity to express their opinions on the future of laboratory medicine. Below are select responses.

When is it okay to “break the rules”?

－－Mohanned Mohammed Bakir, Central Public Health Laboratory, Baghdad, Iraq

“‘The end does not justify the means’; we cannot break the rules, even for a noble goal, even if we are motivated and excited, because we will lose the value of what we have achieved.”

－－Wesal Abbas Ahmed Mohammed, University of Khartoum, Khartoum, Sudan

“Every rule is put into place for a reason. But if each rule is not reviewed regularly, we may miss the fact that the reason for the rule no longer exists. I believe that there is an exception to every restrictive rule. Sometimes breaking the rule is OK, not to break the law and create chaos, but to achieve an overriding priority. We definitely have to weigh the pros and the cons, and be sure that no one gets emotionally or physically hurt.”

－－Kristin Moberg Aakre, Haukeland University Hospital, Bergen, Norway

“Rules may be broken when it is likely that following them may cause harm to someone who is an innocent third party, e.g., laws that have been issued without considering the goals of safety, development and welfare of the society and other people. The laws within science have the purpose of increasing the probability of producing true research results, without harming any third party. The reporting of false results, for example, may increase the risk for offering medical treatment that is ineffective or dangerous. So, within science – the boring ‘never’ seemingly holds true for all occasions.”

－－Yan Zhang, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY

“Break the rules when the choice is between life and death. Rules were created to organize and systematize life, not to ruin it.”

－－Geraldine B. Dayrit, Trinity University of Asia, Quezon City, Philippines

“Rules exist to maintain the status quo, whereas leaders are born to move in new directions. We need to break today’s rules to create a better tomorrow. However, the only time to ‘break the rules’ is after conducting a thorough assessment of the current rules, generating a clear vision of the new practice, having a concrete plan to execute your vision, and being ready to face all the potential obstacles. ‘Break the rules’ is not a single stage action. It is rather a process, during which constant adjustments are required, and where it is essential to stay firm, yet flexible.”

－－Kriti Singh, Kasturba Medical College, Manipal, India

“There is no set answer to this question. Many great people recommend breaking the rules occasionally, but doing so on a regular basis could be counterproductive. Need a break? Break a rule. Protocol standing in your way of treating a patient? Break it. The real answer is. Break the rules when you absolutely have to. Nothing is set in stone.”
“If there is a situation wherein breaking rules can bring about more benefit to the cause/purpose/society without doing much harm to the people concerned it may be appropriate to do so. Any such decision should be weighed properly. The routine breaking of rules as a shortcut to reach the goal faster should be discouraged, as this can cultivate disharmony and mistrust.”

—Krishnananda Prabhu, Kasturba Medical College, Manipal University, Manipal, India

“The only rules that are never to be broken are those that ensure health and safety. All other rules are relative and have to be kept in perspective. So unless the rule is one of the common sense variety, I’d quote Dostoyevsky, ‘To go wrong in one’s own way is better than to go right in someone else’s.’”

—Dima Almekdad, King’s College, London, UK

Beginning in 2014, Quo Vadis? will be part of the Clinical Chemistry Trainee Council. All new questions and answers will be available at www.traineecouncil.org starting January 1st.

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