

Lessons from Canada on Revising National Research Ethics Codes

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SOME CONSTRUCTIVE IDEAS ABOUT RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEES: STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK

- (a) The qualifications of members: belief in the value of research, a selfless and attitude to any paradigmatic form of research, a well-trained mind, a recognized ability, and mature experience;
- (b) Because ethics is about human relations, we need to develop a new consultative process;
- (c) Highlight a cooperative approach, not a competitive one, moving away from an adversarial culture;
- (d) REBs must move away from low-grade work (e.g., editing);
- (e) REBs should not consider methodological paradigms; resist attempts to do “research by committee”;
- (f) Open up deliberations and become transparent: (like the courts) in terms of the meetings themselves, or the paper work;
- (g) The idea of consent has become such a pervasive demand by REBs that it tends to ignore where consent is not needed, e.g. when doing critical inquiry;
- (h) A too great emphasis on legal implications of research (such as a legal scholar chairing the REB) would unduly suppress research, and a too liberal approach to legal matters may deprive research participants, REB members, and researchers of a proper legal recourse.

SOME CONSTRUCTIVE IDEAS ABOUT RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEES: INTERACTIVE FRAMEWORK

- (a) Cultivate a spirit of service;
- (b) Move away from striking “fear” or undue worries for researchers;
- (c) Recognize the need for the Critical perspective as part of ethics review; read some of the 350 critical articles that provide different narratives on research ethics;
- (d) Recognize the need for ethical reflection, rather than indoctrination;
- (e) Foster harmony between REB and researchers; avoid cynical perspectives; let go of the expression, “trust but verify;” don’t feed horror stories, or by always referring back to an old, “unlucky” file..
- (f) Set out a plan to list the virtues individual members of REB should ideally have and include those as necessary qualifications;
- (g) Discourage backbiting or gossip;
- (h) Treat researchers in the same way as you expect researchers to treat research participants.