

EDITORIAL

Dear Reader

I am pleased to present you with this special issue of *Developing World Bioethics*: a series of research ethics training modules. They were developed because leaders of the South African CIPRA consortium commissioned the Bioethics Division at the Wits University Faculty of Health Sciences to produce such a training programme for their staff. CIPRA is the Comprehensive International Programme of Research on AIDS in South Africa. CIPRA, and therefore the development of the training modules, were funded by the US National Institutes of Health. There are usually strings attached to funding, except this time around the strings were purely beneficial. A corollary of this funding modus is that the modules are available free of charge to you (they are in the public domain) and may be reproduced free of charge for non-commercial purposes. Naturally, the authors would appreciate that due credit is given to their work. CIPRA SA decided that there was a strong need to develop research ethics training modules for the developing world by professionals located in the developing world. This may or may not have been a backlash against policy documents ('ethics guidelines') developed by mostly developed world-based academics for usage ('guidance') in the developing world. Under the joint leadership of Ames Dhai, a medical doctor-cum-lawyer who is now heading a bioethics unit in the University of Kwazulu Natal in Durban, and myself, a series of six modules were produced. Ames currently chairs the ethical review committee in her medical school.

Before I provide you with an overview of the contents and some information about the authors, I should like to stress that this has very much been a team effort. Authors of individual modules worked very closely with Ames Dhai or myself and saw their work scrutinised by international experts as well as local peer reviewers to guarantee the high standards you, as a reader of this journal, can rightfully expect.

How to use the modules

Basically, after reading the first introductory module, you can read and work through any module that you find interesting. However, I should like to stress that the introductory module is truly core, in the sense that you should read and reflect on its content first. You might also find our self-test tools at the end of the issue useful. We have set multiple-choice questions for each of the modules at the end of the issue. If you manage to answer 6 or 7 out of 10 questions correctly, you would be doing pretty well. I do appreciate concerns about the utility and appropriateness of simply using multiple-choice questions as examination tools in an ethics course, but after some discussion the authoring team of the modules agreed that this was the best means of examination that could be achieved under the circumstances. The circumstances effectively demanded that no further resources would be made available after publication of the modules. In other words, we would not be able to set questions requiring us to evaluate written arguments by people who might choose to voluntarily take such a test.

Overview of the modules

Introductory Module

The introductory module, authored by myself, provides you with a quick crash-course on ethical and bioethical concepts aiming to enable you to utilise those concepts in your own ethical problem solving. One important objective of this module is also to enable you to distinguish ethical from other types of problem.

Standards of Care Module

Michael Selgelid, who worked at the time as a lecturer at Wits University in Johannesburg, is the author of a module introducing you to the main arguments in an important international debate on what standards of care are ethically required for research participants in a study undertaken in a developing country. The contentious issue is whether we should aim for universal standards of care requiring that participants in a developing world country receive the same (universal) standards of care as someone participating in the same trial undertaken in, say, Switzerland. The significance of this topic can easily be derived from a flurry of publications in international journals as well as a landmark review

of the issues published in a monograph by Ruth Macklin, one of the valued members of our Editorial Board.

Informed Consent Module

Pamela Andanda, originally from Kenya, is a trained lawyer with a specialisation in research ethics. Working currently in the Wits University Law School, Pamela Andanda is introducing to you a very fundamental issue in research ethics but also in bioethics generally. Informed consent is of such importance because it enables us and others to express whether or not we would like to participate in a given clinical trial or survey or not, and to be respected in such wishes. In most countries, including South Africa, this right is constitutionally protected, so it is a matter the lawmakers are taking very seriously, too.

Implementation of Ethics Review

For many researchers, ethical review constitutes a hassle, a barrier to what they wish to do. Ames Dhai from the Nelson Mandela School of Medicine in South Africa, and chairperson of that School's ethical review committee will shed light on why there is a need for ethical review, how it works and what the proper role of members of such review committees entails.

Other Issues

The module on other issues was principally produced by Benjamin Schneider, an undergraduate student at Stanford University who, at the time of writing, worked as a research assistant in the bioethics division of the Witwatersrand University Faculty of Health Sciences, as well as myself. Our task was to cover important issues that were not addressed in the other modules and that were not requiring the attention of a dedicated stand-alone module. We are looking at issues such as scientific misconduct as well as the sometimes tricky question of who has claim to be an author or co-author of a jointly produced scientific article. While this latter issue might not be of great concern to some users of our modules, it certainly is of great importance to anyone working professionally as a researcher in an academic institution or for a commercial research organisation wanting to ensure that due credit is given to his or her intellectual contribution to a particular finding.

Special and Vulnerable Populations

Jason Lott, a bright up-and-coming scholar, currently studying at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School, visited us again during the production of the modules and agreed kindly to work with and for us on a module looking at populations requiring our special attention and care. It's a good module to read and bear in mind, despite some recently expressed concerns about the viability and operationalisability of vulnerability as a concept in research ethics.

On behalf of the authoring team, may I express our sincere hope that these modules may be of use to you. Should you wish to translate any of the modules to further increase its utility, you are welcome to do so, but please note the guidance given in our module on other issues.

I should like to thank my one time colleague, and good friend, Ames Dhai for her valuable contribution to this program, as well as the other authors, and last but not least our funder, the US National Institutes of Health through the South Africa based CIPRA programme. Of the CIPRA staff we should like to thank Helen Rees, Francois Venter and Tatiana Ndong of the Reproductive Health Research Unit at Witwatersrand University as well as Thofi Bishop, the capable Projects Manager of the Bioethics Division.

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