



Developing and implementing an internal ethics vetting process for The UBC Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences' Pharmacy Education Research and Leadership (PERL) stream

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Background

- The UBC Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences' Pharmacy Education Research and Leadership (PERL) stream is one of four core research themes in the Faculty.
- PERL's primary goal is to advance the quality of pharmacy education through educational scholarship and research
- To ensure ethical practice and conduct of PERL projects formal ethics review by UBC's Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) is warranted
- However, for many PERL projects there remains frustration and confusion about the need for formal BREB applications and review

Objective

- To develop and implement an internal ethics vetting guide to streamline the research process for PERL members

Methodology

- Completed Tri-council tutorial (TSP2) on research ethics (on RISE)
- Reviewed the scholarly literature for relevant educational research and guidance on ethics applications
- Examined relevant ethics documents from various UBC departments
- Collaborated with UBC's Office of Research Ethics, Centre for Health Education Scholarship and Centre for Teaching Learning and Technology along with PERL members for input
- Final guide, comprising four components, required several drafting and redrafting phases

Components of Guide

1. A four-step decision-making process delineating the need for formal ethics application and review
2. A narrative outlining crucial implications in the decision-making process
3. A review of key principles required for ethical conduct of pedagogical research
4. An appendix of examples showing how the guide can be applied.

Results

Ethics vetting process



Formulated questions checklist (Step 2 of ethics vetting process)

1. Does the project/study fit the TCPS' definition of "research" or "quality assurance/improvement"?
2. Will any of the concepts of consent, informing students, confidentiality, vulnerability and beneficence be compromised at anytime during the project?
3. Is there uncertainty of possible risk to any participant through experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort?
4. Is the project design and methodology rigorous enough to statistically support generalizations beyond the particular population that will participate in the project?
5. Is the project funded by (or being submitted to) a grant/award competition from a funding agency that requires research ethics review?
6. Does the project involve "randomization" to contrast interventions to participants or other systematic sampling techniques to divide participants into different groups?
7. Does the project involve a comparison of interventions or processes and "control" settings or groups either to test a new intervention or to assess the effectiveness of a process change?

Discussion

A key issue in determining the requirement for BREB review is understanding the difference between Canada's Tri-council Policy Statement's (TCPS) classifications of "research" and "quality improvement/assurance" (Question 1)

- Delineation of these two terms requires careful reflection of the intention of the project and the project's final outcomes; the ethics vetting guide explains these terms in detail.
- Furthermore, the following criteria helped with delineation: context and locus of attention, data sources, expectations from faculty and of students, generalizability and dissemination

Limitations

- Ambiguity for some Step 2 questions
- Establishing the requirement for formal ethics review of educational scholarship can be highly nuanced; determining a definitive answer of "yes" or "no" to some Step 2 questions may be difficult.
- Potential solutions: 1) extending the guide appendix with example scenarios which may help extrapolate answers; 2) collaboration with faculty colleagues may help with decision-making (Step 3).
- Guide has not been extensively tested

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