

EDITORIAL

Marge Scott

**Chair of the Health Research Council
Ethics Committee**

The Health Research Council Ethics Committee (HRCEC) is a Health Research Council (HRC) statutory committee. Its functions include:

- making recommendations to the HRC on ethical issues in relation to health research
- formulating and reviewing ethical guidelines
- ensuring that HRC-funded research is ethically reviewed
- providing advice on membership, procedures and standards of committees
- providing independent comment.

The HRCEC delegates the responsibility to review research proposals that are funded by the HRC to the regional and institutional ethics committees that it has approved.

The approval of ethics committees by the HRCEC is a formal process that is necessary if an ethics committee is to approve a study seeking funding from the HRC. Ethics committees that have been

approved by the HRCEC also meet the conditions required to conduct ethical review for the purposes of the Health Information Privacy Code and ACC legislation. The HRCEC reviews the Annual Reports of approved ethics committees and provides advice and recommendations where appropriate to enhance committee performance.

Developing and updating guidelines for those conducting research is a key HRCEC activity. Working with the HRC's Māori Health Committee and Pacific Health Research Committee, the HRCEC has also prepared guidelines relevant to the conduct of research involving these two important populations.

Together with the Ministry of Health, the HRCEC is responsible for the regular updating of the National Application Form for Ethical Review of a Research Project.

The HRCEC also provides second opinions arising from requests from an ethics committee or from an investigator. This is an important role, which often provides an opportunity for the HRCEC to request changes or clarification of current policy and/or processes.

The HRCEC has strong linkages with the ethics team in the Ministry of Health and with the other statutory ethics committees. Provision of submissions on discussion papers and new legislation is an ongoing activity.

The work on ethics within the HRC Secretariat is co-ordinated by Jean Gibbons with assistance from Felicity Wood. Dr Bruce Scoggins, the chief executive of the HRC, also plays a valued role

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with his extensive experience in ethics and health research.

In the next few months the HRCEC will work on a Māori framework for ethical review that is being developed by NEAC, and on provision of advice on the ethics of innovative practice.

The HRCEC has close links with the ethics committees associated with sister agencies in the UK, Australia, Canada and the US, and also contributes to international forums discussing ethics and health research.

New Application Form

The application form researchers must use to apply for ethical review has recently been changed.

All applications, apart from those that involve only retrospective review of notes or data, must now include:

- the Application Form for Ethical Review of a Research Project (NAF-2005-v1)
- locality assessment forms for each proposed study locality.

If your research involves any of the following activities, your application must also be accompanied by the relevant extra form(s):

- use of human tissue (NAF part 5)
- genetic research (NAF part 6)
- participants who are unable to give informed consent (NAF part 7).

All application forms and documents are available online at www.newhealth.govt.nz/ethicscommittees/application.html

Please contact the National Co-ordinator of Ethics Committees, Sally Cook, on sally_cook@moh.govt.nz with any queries you have about how to use the new forms.

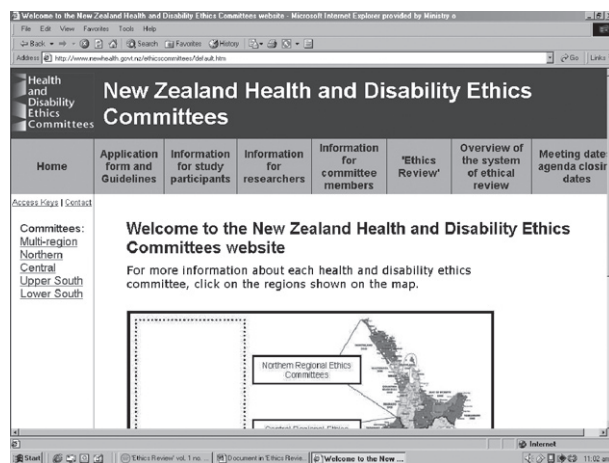
New Website

The new website for health and disability ethics committees in New Zealand is now online at www.newhealth.govt.nz/ethicscommittees. It replaces the previous ethics committee page on the Ministry of Health's site.

The site is intended to be a one-stop shop for anyone interested in New Zealand's system of ethical review. On the site you will find:

- application forms and guidelines on various types of research in New Zealand
- meeting dates and agenda closing dates
- agendas and minutes from committee meetings
- information for study participants
- information on locality assessment
- links to other, related bodies in New Zealand and overseas
- back issues of *Ethics Review*
- general information about New Zealand's system of ethical review.

The site will be updated regularly. If you have suggestions on what should be added, or comments on what is already there, please contact Sally Cook sally_cook@moh.govt.nz



Profile:

Riria Tautau-Grant Administrator

Lower South Regional Ethics Committee

When Riria Tautau-Grant stood in temporarily for an Otago Ethics Committee administrator a few years ago, she enjoyed the job so much that she decided to apply for it when it became vacant.



With a background in education – Riria set up a Kura Kaupapa Māori in Dunedin and managed an alternative education centre immediately prior to joining the Ministry – ethics committee administration offered something interesting and different. Having had to establish management and governance administrative systems from scratch in the past, she enjoyed coming into a structured environment. She had learned a lot from the committee members and the National Co-ordinator, who was at that time based in Dunedin, was impressed with their commitment and professionalism, and developed an interest in supporting that work. Riria enjoys the opportunity her job offers to learn more about and make sense of the research sector.

Of Ngati Porou descent and originally from the East Coast, Riria enjoys living in Dunedin, having made the move south in 1992 for family reasons. The Dunedin office of the Ministry of Health is spacious and located in Moray Place, right in the heart of Dunedin. She says she 'might even get used to the weather one day'.

Riria is married with four daughters and three grandchildren, 'with another one on the way any minute'. When she is not working or being the 'best grandmother there is' to her mokopuna, Riria maintains her interests in education and governance as a trustee of Queen's High School and a member of the National Board of New Zealand School Trustees.

Who completes a locality assessment?

The principal researcher at each site should complete the locality assessment form.

The questions on the form are examples only and researchers need to consider the specific issues for their locality, and advise how they have been addressed. All researchers involved at the site should be listed on the locality assessment form under 'Local Investigators'.

The locality organisation is asked to check whether the researcher has considered all the local issues and satisfactorily addressed them. It would assist the Committees if locality organisations advised their Regional Ethics Committee/s and the Multi-region Ethics Committee of the name, position and contact details of people authorised to sign a locality assessment on their behalf.

Training

All members of the seven health and disability ethics committees have now received training in ethics committee processes.

Thank you to all those who participated and made the sessions lively and interesting.

Copies of material and presentations used in training ethics committee members will be made available shortly through the 'Information for committee members' page of the ethics committees' new website.

Overview of ethical review

