Technical issues during ethics review

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**Preface**

**DISCLOSURES**

- External referee for the PCHRD and Cochrane Public Health
- Ethics reviewer for UPMREB and SJREB
- Trainor for PHREB-CIDTA
- Contributor to the 2017 and 2022 national ethics guidelines

**DISCLAIMER**

- The views, information, or opinions expressed in this material are solely those of the presenter and do not necessarily represent those of the University of the Philippines or the other institutions or groups with which the presenter is affiliated.
Outline of presentation

1. Is technical review necessary at the REC level?

2. How frequently do RECs raise design-related queries?

3. What are the common design issues encountered by RECs?

4. Why are these technical issues still encountered at the REC level?

5. What can be done to address these concerns?
1. Is technical review necessary at the REC level?

**Bad science = Bad ethics**
- QUALITY
  - i.e., part of peer review process
- SOCIAL VALUE
  - i.e., trustworthiness of findings
- NORM
  - i.e., prescribed by guidelines

**Double jeopardy**
- INEFFICIENCY
  - i.e., duplicates prior peer review
- SCOPE CREEP
  - i.e., undue focus on science vis-à-vis ethics
- NO CLEAR BENEFIT
  - i.e., no evidence of improved research quality

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2. How frequently are design-related queries raised?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Inclusive period</th>
<th>Technical issues raised</th>
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3a. What are the design issues encountered by RECs?

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<tr>
<th>Technical issue</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Level of intensity</th>
<th>Rank</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Justification for study</td>
<td>Angell et al., 2007</td>
<td>4 / 7</td>
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<td>Bueno et al., 2009</td>
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<td>Adams et al., 2013</td>
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<td>Tsoka-Gwegweni et al., 2014</td>
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<td>van Lent et al., 2014</td>
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<td>Hemminki et al., 2015</td>
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<td>Happo et al., 2017</td>
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<td>2. Research question</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 / 7</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Study design</td>
<td></td>
<td>6 / 7</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Sample and sampling design</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 / 7</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Data collection procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Instrumentation</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Data analysis</td>
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<td>4 / 7</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Feasibility of the study</td>
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</table>
3b. What are the design issues encountered by RECs?
4. Why are these technical issues still encountered?

- **Philosophical differences**
  *i.e.*, predominance of positivist perspective

- **Methodological expertise**
  *i.e.*, limited range and breadth

- **Trust in prior review**
  *i.e.*, quality of technical review

- **Scientific writing**
  *i.e.*, quality of written proposal

Dolan, 1999; Stevenson et al, 2015; Tod et al, 2002
5. What can be done to address these concerns?

**Researcher**

- Adhere to research best practices in the discipline
- Clearly communicate design choices in the proposal (i.e., why and how)

**Technical review panel**

- Undertake a review of the technical merits of a research proposal that upholds fairness, integrity and objectivity
  
  (Coveney et al, 2017)

**REC**

- Ensure broad representation of methodological expertise
- Practice “epistemic humility” (Churchill, 2020)
- Focus on good-for-context, not best-in-the-world, design
Key messages

Technical review at the REC level is important to ensure scientific and ethical soundness of the protocol.

Detection of design issues at the REC level point to issues concerning the researcher, the technical panel, and the REC.

RECs should recognize methodologic plurality, practice epistemic humility, and remember that scientific soundness is about both validity and feasibility.

Questions or comments? You may email me at ctantonio@up.edu.ph
Thank you for listening!

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References


