

What characterizes effective research ethics review of urgent protocols during a crisis?



We interviewed members of 13 Research Ethics Committees (RECs) from around the world that had reviewed protocols for research in situations of natural disaster. The respondents described characteristics of effective ethics review of urgent protocols. We think that these insights might prove useful to RECs during the ongoing outbreak of COVID-19:

TIMELY

To provide timely review of urgent studies, RECs relied on

adaptations of standard procedures, including:

1) convening ad hoc meetings, 2) conducting reviews remotely, 3) waiving deadlines, 4) ranking protocols by urgency, 5) having advisors pre-review protocols, & 6) reviewing generic protocols in advance. Respondents also reported that RECs should consider whether some studies should be delayed until the crisis abates.

Effective ethics review integrates three elements

RIGOROUS

Rigorous review was linked with providing **careful assessment of ethical considerations** related to the research, as well as ensuring independence of the review process. Within adapted procedures, RECs remain committed to providing due scrutiny of protocols to protect participants and society.

RESPONSIVE

Respondents emphasized that responsive review required **awareness of and sensitivity to the particularities of the emergency settings, including sociocultural context**. They identified strategies to increase awareness of these realities including developing partnerships with other RECs, providing training and using knowledgeable advisors.

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