Enhancing Capacity of Research Ethics Review Committees in Developing Countries: The Kenyan Example

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INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the number of clinical trials being conducted in developing countries has increased remarkably for several reasons that include cheaper cost of conducting medical research due to availability of cheaper labor, less stringent ethical oversight, and the promise of innovation, among others. The medical research environment in developing countries, however, remains at risk of research ethics violations. As a result, the need for well-structured research ethics oversight has become more critical.

METHODS

Training needs assessment and ethics sensitization seminars. These were held in different regions of Kenya between July and September 2011. Assessment was conducted using a standard questionnaire aimed at finding out the composition of ERCs. If ERC members had had ethics training, procedures ERCs used to review protocols, among others. Each assessment was followed by a training of ERC members on the universal ethical principles. ERC members were trained in general introductions to ethics, role of ERCs, ethical trials, ERC requirements and guidelines for ERC accreditation and NACOST guidelines for ethical review of research proposals. Feedback from participants obtained at end of each seminar was used to improve the quality of subsequent seminars.

RESULTS

Training needs assessment and sensitization seminars

Sixteen (16%) of identified ERCs sent members to the needs assessment and sensitization workshops. The ERC members took part in the following areas: general introduction to ethics, role of ERCs, ethical trials, ERC requirements and guidelines for ERC accreditation and NACOST guidelines for ethical review of research proposals.

Conclusions

Several training needs of ERC members were identified through the training needs assessment. These were very useful in designing a training module for ERCs in Kenya.

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