

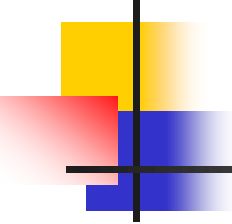


Ontario Colleges Multi-college ethics review process

**Pulling together:
Making research and research ethics
better in the Ontario college system**

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The Multi-college Ethics Working Group

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The problem

- A minimal risk, multi-college study currently takes a researcher a lot of time and effort to get through different colleges and often results in delays
- Redundancy: REBs are using a lot of resources to repeat the same review activity at each college
- We can improve on that!



Our goal: a multi-college ethics review process

- Only for minimal risk, multi-college studies
- Only for REBs that want to participate



Support for a multi-college ethics review process

- The working group developed a process with input and support from the Secretariat
- Full support confirmed from HAR (Nov 2015)
- Process was pilot tested and evaluated
- Plan to launch: September 2016, after meeting with all REB Chairs



The Multi-college ethics process: how it works

- A researcher wants to conduct research at several Ontario colleges
- Researchers submit the multi-college application form to their home college REB noting that the project is **multi-college** and **minimal risk**
- REB Chair/Coordinator sends the application to an expert panel for review
- Or: Researchers may submit their application directly to the expert review panel Lead



The Expert Panel: Who are they?

- Five to seven REB Chairs who volunteer to sit on the Expert panel and review multi-college applications for two years; one acts as Lead
- Members must have a minimum of two years' REB review experience
- The Lead's role: receive the ethics application referrals from the referral college, screen them, then send out a call for reviewers from the panel (each review requires three reviewers)



The expert panel process

- The panel members review within 10 working days using the multi-college reviewer checklist
- EP members comment only on substantive ethical issues (not institutional risk issues)
- EP Lead coordinates the review and feedback to the researcher, works with researcher to finalize the application and issues a recommendation letter to the researcher (not an approval letter)



The researcher and the individual REB

- Researcher sends the final application and the recommendation letter to all colleges where research is proposed
- At the college: **One** person (likely REB Chair) reviews the application **within 5 working days** and, if appropriate, **issues the certificate of ethical approval to the researcher.**
- Researcher communicates directly with each college to determine other college-specific requirements and completes those requirements
- Files saved on secure site on O3 website and colleges keep their own files



Advantages of the Multi-college process

- TCPS2 compliant and supported by the Secretariat
- Easy to implement: this is a procedure change, not a policy change (procedure script available)
- review by 4 'experts' (compared to the usual 2) +
Local perspective on the review
- Ethics approval continues to rest with individual college
- Nimble and efficient process: ethics review completed at all sites in 15 days



Pilot test done

- The process was tested with several colleges
- Evaluated from all perspectives: researchers, the REB Chairs /Coordinators, the Expert Panel members and Directors/VPs Applied Research. We asked:
- What were the challenges? Benefits/advantages?
- How long did the reviews take?
- What local college and cross system supports are needed to sustain the process?
- Data collection involved interviews, surveys and process metrics



Results

- Five applications sent to the expert panel (EP) during the six month project
- Average review time by the EP was 9 days.
- The EP largely agreed on issues related to ethics and panel members reported that the referral, review and recommendation process functioned well.
- Researchers: a positive experience with the EP
- Mixed results and researcher dissatisfaction with the college REB process



Results from the college REB reviews

- 21 reviews: large variation in review time:
- Seven (33.3%) were reviewed in 0 to 2 days.
- Seven (33.3%) reviewed in 3 to 8 days however,
- Two (9.5%) took 18 to 25 days and five (23.9%) were very slow, taking 44 to 54 + days.
- Main reasons for delays: REB requests for **institutional risk management** documents ie researchers/entire team complete TCPS2 training, institutional approval, local investigators etc.....
- Other concerns: REB concerns about just having one reviewer/anxiety about **liability**, fear of loss of role, 'young' REBs concerned they won't build expertise



Agreement with HAR to go forward (Nov 2015)

HAR ethics working group will:

Share education materials, and procedure documents with the REBs, explaining the multi-college process, hold webinars/info sessions

Assemble and prepare the expert panel and roll out the process to any interested college in Sept 2016

HAR members will:

- Communicate their support for the procedure change and ongoing professional development for REB members at their college
- Provide support (one hour/week) for an REB coordinator to handle filing, communication with the researcher. Responsibility for that support will rotate colleges every two years



Let's talk!

- What questions do you have?
- What are your thoughts/concerns?
- What other information/support do you need to adopt this procedure?
- Suggestions?



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