

Are research **merit/methodological** matters the business of ethical reviewers?



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Familiar questions/statements...

Discussion during ethical review

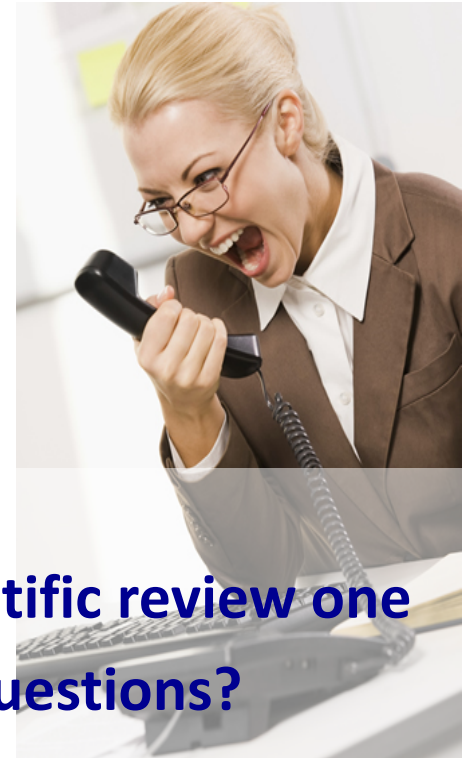
Is it our job to consider the merit of a project?

Should we give feedback on methodological matters?

Should we limit our discussion to ethical matters?



Familiar questions/statements...



Retorts from applicants

You're a research ethics review body not a scientific review one

What gives you the authority to ask me these questions?

The merit of this project has already been assessed.

You obviously don't understand work like this.

Research merit

The National Statement



- As a core ethical principle (NS1.1)
 - » Contribution to knowledge
 - » Appropriate methods
 - » Based on literature review
 - » Expertise or supervision
 - » Facilities/resources
- Directions with regard to the appropriateness of designs for participants, contexts and types of methods
- Directions with regards to the expertise of researchers

Research merit

The National Statement



- CHALLENGES
 - » HREC composition
 - » Diversity of designs and methods
 - » Innovative research
- The compelling trap of precedent-based decision making
- Recognising the limitations of peer review, grant processes and other scientific reviews
- Risk aversion and conservative thinking

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES?

Research merit

Practical strategies

- During ethical review
 - » Taking a proportional approach
 - » Is there a beneficence consideration?
 - » Avoid methodological bias
 - » Do we need expert advice?
- Review feedback
 - » Condition or observation
 - » Cite the *National Statement*
 - » Facilitate research
- Processing the response
 - » Delegation
 - » Invite discourse and feedback
 - » Learning institution



Research merit

RESOURCING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE



- Policy resource for researchers and reviewers (e.g. the GUREM)
- Reference NS and resources in review outcomes
- Discuss in professional development workshops
- Avoid one-size-fits-all and absolute approaches
- Presentations to the HREC (**not** as part of the review of a project)



Food for thought and a shameless plug



- About the Australasian Human Research Ethics Consultancy Services
- Development of policy and resource material
- Professional development
- Research Integrity Advisers
- Interface with the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*

Thank you

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