

JERHRE NOTES

Concepts, Tools, and Resources for Solving Ethical Problems in Human Research

Evaluating the Ethics Committee

When 886 experienced biomedical and social/behavioral scientists rated the importance of 45 descriptors of their ethics committees, using the IRB Researcher Assessment Tool (IRB RAT). It was found that:

- Researchers believe that a knowledgeable committee, operating within its mandate, is needed to protect human subjects.
- Timeliness, lack of bias, fairness, open communication, and fostering valid science are rated as of paramount importance.
- Biomedical and social/behavioral scientists have the same concerns.
- Perceived unfairness motivates some researchers to engage in subterfuge and misconduct designed to “level the playing field.”

Inspired by these findings, some ethics committees have now used the IRB RAT to identify areas in which their performance is rated as deficient. Based on the results of anonymous researcher evaluation of their performance, they have focused education of members and policy changes on areas where improvement is needed. They have also compared their evaluation of themselves with the evaluation of their performance by investigators, and compared themselves to the national sample. The Rat Test and User Guide may be found at:

<http://www.ethicsresearch.com/IRB%20RAT%20Users%20Guide%20revised%203-11-05.pdf>.

Keith-Spiegel, P., Koocher, G. P., & Tabachnick, B. (2006). What scientists want from their ethics committee. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, 1(1), 67-81.

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