

JERHRE NOTES

Skills for Solving Ethical Problems in Human Research

Auditing the Gatekeepers

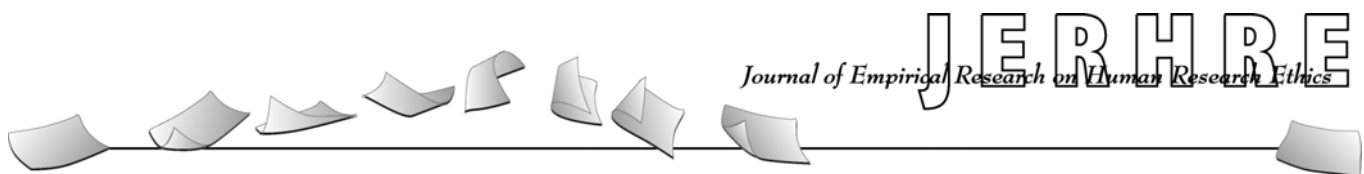
Responsibility for ethics of research rests on many unacknowledged gatekeepers who can affect the research and the subjects. However, gatekeepers' other roles and training may not focus their attention on ethics. Gatekeepers include, for example, recruiters, statisticians, research assistants, and administrators of organizations where research subjects live or work.

Older adults living in long-term care (LTC) settings are vulnerable to coercion, and LTC administrators are required by law to oversee the ethical conduct of research in their facility. Hickman, et al surveyed LTC administrators, found that they are unfamiliar with ethical requirements for human research, and observed that their role is incompatible with ethical oversight of research. LTC administrators of necessity must focus on resident care, employee relations, meeting industry regulatory requirements, and remaining financially viable. Thus, for example, they defer to the judgment of family members about research participation, often overriding the judgment of elders who are entirely competent to consent for themselves.

Similarly, McNutt, et al found that research assistants responsible for ensuring that subjects read and understand the informed consent consider subjects "consented" after they had spent only a few seconds with the consent form. This study calls attention to the importance of *not* assuming that a signed consent form is a read consent form.

Hickman, S., et al (2008). Administrators' perspectives on ethical issues in long-term care research. *JERHRE*, 3(1), 69-78.

McNutt., et al (2008). Are we misjudging how well informed consent forms are read? *JERHRE*, 3(1), 89-98.



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