Collective action by Ethics Review Committees towards encouraging responsible behaviour: the Sri Lankan Experience

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Historical Background

- First ERC in Sri Lanka was set up in 1981 in the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo
- Many ERCs since then, mainly in Medical Schools
- First attempt to set up a national level ethics review committee was in the early 1990s, failed
- Several committees have been set up at national level at different times
- But, still no apex National Ethics Committee
Issues faced by ERCs at the turn of the Century

• No legislation to govern research and research ethics
• No national guidelines
• No networking between ERCs
Forum of Ethics Review Committees in Sri Lanka (FERCSL)

Sri Lanka Medical Association

2003
ERC, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo

Collective Action by ERCs

First meeting in August 2005
Objectives

1. To identify common issues faced by ERCs in Sri Lanka.

2. To identify solutions for those problems which could be sorted out by dialog and communication or by consensus between ERCs.

3. To make recommendations to the Ministries of Science and Technology, Health, and Higher Education on issues which require national direction and/or policy planning.

Forum of Ethics Review Committees in Sri Lanka (FERCSL)
Under the Sri Lanka Medical Association (SLMA)
Convened by the ERC, Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo

www.fercsl.net
Activities of FERCSL

• National Conference On “Responding To Emerging Ethical Issues In Research On Human Subjects: Working Towards A National Consensus” – 30 November to 2 December 2006

• Development and Adoption of National Guidelines for Ethics Review Committees – July 2007
FERCSL Guidelines Conform to

- Nuremberg Trial: The Nuremberg Code – 1947
- UN: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights – 1948
- Belmont Report – 1979
- ICH/CGP – 1996
Completed/Ongoing Activities

• Workshops for Developing and Adopting Guidelines on
  – International Collaborative Research
  – Biological Samples and Human Genetic Data: Collection, Processing, Use and Storage
  – Protection of Animals Used in Research

• Courses
  – Certificate Course on Research Ethics Review
  – Certificate Course on Research Ethics
  – Dept/Bioethics, NIH - Course on Ethical and Regulatory Aspects of Clinical Research (via video conferencing)
New Future Activities

• Workshops for Developing and Adopting Guidelines on
  – Clinical Trials
  – Sharing of Biological Samples with Foreign Researchers

• Courses
  – GCP Training
  – SOP Development (in collaboration with FERCAP/WHO)
Sri Lanka Clinical Trials Registry (SLCTR)

http://www.slctr.lk
Conclusion

• All these activities have been done through the collective efforts of the ERCs using local expertise and minimal foreign input.

• Individuals have donated their time and expertise voluntarily, so cost have been minimal.

• There has been no demand from the public or the government for such action.

• This shows that the scientific community can still come together to effectively regulate itself and promote ethical conduct of research.