



To: The Editor
From: Dr. P. Pearl O'Rourke
Re: "Ethics Panels Expand Grip, No Field Is Off Limits," By Patricia Cohen, February 28, 2007
Date: March 5, 2007

As the Board Chair of an international organization dedicated to advancing ethical research, I am responding to Patricia Cohen's February 28th article that suggests Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) are obstructive and overreaching.

The independent review of research by a skilled IRB is critical to the protection of human subjects involved in social science as well as biomedical research. Whether the risks are physical or psychological, the IRB is responsible for ensuring that all efforts are made to justify and minimize any risk. It's unfortunate that the need for and value of this oversight was not communicated.

Ms. Cohen's article correctly highlights the need for expanded education of IRBs and investigators. Thoughtful application of the regulations will enhance protections for human subjects and allow worthwhile and responsible research to proceed.

Researchers are not entitled to conduct research with human subjects, but subjects *are* entitled to the protections afforded by an IRB.

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