Enhanced IRB/Research Ethics Committee (REC) Collaborative Review through Videoconferencing
Daima Bukini; Richard Waddell; Muhsin Aboud; Susan Adams; Eligius Lyamuya; Joyce Masalu; Elizabeth Bankert; Lorri Wettemann
Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth University

Submission Type: Programmatic
Topic Area: IRB Operations
Poster Number: 47

The Context: As international collaborative health research activities increase, building IRB/REC infrastructure and capacity in resource-limited countries for efficient and thorough review of research protocols becomes more critical, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. International investigators may face challenges with conducting research in these settings, and one is assuring that ethical reviews of studies are completed in a timely manner so to accomplish the goals of the project. Input from the host country’s IRB/REC is very important and a collaborative review process benefits both entities.

The Problem: The length of time involved in securing IRB/REC review and approval is an important factor investigators must consider when planning research in Sub-Saharan Africa as delays can result in a wide range of problems that may hinder data collection. There can be multiple reasons for these delays, such as onerous workloads on committee members, inadequate REC membership, lack of clear policies and procedures outlining research review processes, and limited training for committee members.

Our Approach to the Problem: To improve the competencies of the IRB/REC committees at both a US-based college and at an university in Tanzania, we organized “rapid review” sub-committees of IRB members to review projects being conducted at both institutions. A primary reviewer at each committee was responsible for presenting ethical issues. To facilitate review, five joint videoconference sessions were held between February 2011 and March 2012. These innovative sessions were conducted at a US-based college’s center on advancing of learning and an African country’s global development learning center, both of which have state-of-the-art facilities and equipment. In addition to the reviews, the videoconferences included continuing ethics education. All documents were shared electronically two weeks in advance of the session.

Program Evaluation and Lessons Learned: An evaluation of the joint videoconferences was done using Survey Monkey: Sessions were helpful or very helpful; electronic document sharing was helpful and efficient; primary reviewers at each site was appropriate; continuing education component was very helpful; benefit: continuing education, live interaction, understanding committee differences, challenges, and perspectives on how reviews are performed but achieve the same outcome; suggestion: designate one videoconference for a discussion of differences in approaches and priorities; and overall assessment: collaborative videoconferencing is a superior method for review for studies being conducted in disparate areas of the world.