Perspectives on the Training and Development of New IRB Administrators
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Background: IRB Administrators play a critical role in supporting management and function of IRBs. This role may vary among institutions, but can be broken down into core responsibilities, which are essential for review of research involving human participants. Administrators serve as the liaison between the IRB and research community, which requires being well informed on the regulatory requirements for human subjects protections and best practices for applying them. In addition, they will assist the IRB Chair(s), and monitor and support day-to-day IRB operations.

Findings: In today’s increasingly complex research environment, it is imperative to have trained professional IRB Administrators to help create an institutional environment that assures ethical conduct of human subjects research, as well as facilitation of the review process. Currently, there is not much literature geared toward development and training of Administrators; therefore, we hope to provide perspective and suggest specific strategies to improve the consistency and quality in the training and development of IRB Administrators. The IRB adopted a collaborative approach to training and development of new Administrators which included: a. A Structured Weekly Training Plan (this involves function based training with trainers who have expertise in the specific functions being taught), Certified IRB Professional (CIP) training (regardless of eligibility to take the test), which offers broad exposure to regulations, IRB practices, and professional development, and with an intended goal to obtain CIP certification once eligible for test; b. Public Responsibility in Medicine and Research/Office for Human Research Protections/Food and Drug Administration training modules (utilizing online webinars and regional workshops for ongoing development); and c. Attendance at local workshops designed for the research community to provide perspective of the research community responsibilities in relationship to the IRB.

Conclusions: This collaborative training effort that engages staff members at all levels in the training process is ideal for any size IRB and allows for maximum learning by the new personnel without significant training burden on only a few staff members. Additionally, utilizing training and development resources from both federal agencies and professional organizations involved in the protection of human research subjects further expands the IRB Administrator’s resource toolbox and builds their engagement in this profession early on. This comprehensive approach builds a solid knowledge base in regulatory policies and procedures (federal, local, and institutional levels) that allows the new IRB Administrator to confidently assume their review responsibilities.