Enhanced IRB/REC Collaborative Review Through Videoconferencing

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### 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 timely completed in order to accomplish the goals of the project.

Contributions made by the host country’s IRB/REC are very important and a collaborative review process benefits both entities.

Supported by the Fogarty International Center of the National Institutes of Health under award #1SO7TW008844.

### 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 many reasons for these delays, such as:
- onerous workloads on committee members,
- inadequate REC membership,
- lack of institutional policies and procedures for REC review,
- limited training for committee members.

### Our Approach to the Problem

- To improve the competencies of the IRB/REC committees at both Dartmouth and MUHAS, we organized “rapid review” 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 reviews, five joint videoconference sessions were held between February 2011 and March 2012. These innovative sessions were conducted at Dartmouth’s Center for the Advancement of Learning and the Tanzania 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

- Sessions were rated helpful to very helpful
- Electronic document sharing was helpful and efficient
- Having primary reviewers at each site was appropriate
- Continuing education component was very helpful

### Lessons Learned

- Benefit: continuing education, live interaction, understanding committee differences, challenges, and perspectives on how reviews are performed but achieve the same goals
- Suggestion: designate one videoconference for a discussion of differences in approaches and priorities
- Overall assessment: collaborative videoconferencing is a superior method for review for studies being conducted in disparate areas of the world.

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