PANEL REPORT

Ethics Review Process EJPRD
17 September - 9 November 2019

The Panel wishes to thank the staff of EJPRD coordination unit for Ethics for their work organising this Ethics Review process, for the provision of documents, and general help. During the remote Ethics review for 29 projects they were always helpful and informative.

General Comments

The panel consisted of six reviewers. One of the reviewers drafted the final ethics review reports based on the comments of at least three other readers, and in the case of mandatory assessment, as per H2020 rules, four. In all cases, the Rapporteur was also a reader. The panel has a number of observations and some suggestions, related to documents that may help to streamline and simplify the ethics process in future and with the future management of the ethics aspects of the projects

Ethics Report drafting format

1. It might be helpful to have an electronic merging tool to deal with the ERR should larger numbers of projects be expected.

Regarding clearance:

1. It was suggested, and the panel agreed, that the H2020 ethics criteria, as implemented by Health (EJPRD is funded by RTD Health) and the ERC be followed. In fact, these two overlap, and have led to a good result when follow-up and audit of the ethics was carried out, as the rules foresee.
2. Clearance means that the project is "ethics ready" - any project in the area of translational or even most phases of life sciences is not ethics ready until it is finished and a full complement of documents is validated and the file closed. Clearance is more appropriate for mathematics, physics, basic mathematical sciences and by and large, projects with no human content.
3. Conditional clearance is more appropriate for research that has an on-going ethics activity to report during the life of the project, however light. If it has licences to be kept current, alterations in the circumstances, adaptation of any sort, with possible impact on the opinions of local or overarching ethics committees, it is more appropriate to keep an open time-line for the ethics management of the projects.
4. The content of the projects also impacts both the number of reviewers and H2020 rules foresee that, any type of hESC, (even if commercially obtained) or some instances of foetal tissues, the decision to proceed with the research requires a wider consensus. This means 4 readers instead of 3 were assigned to that type of project. Similarly, registration of iPSC cells generated during the projects in the EUhPSCReg is recommended, and likewise this was included in the reports.
5. For a question of proportionality and sensitivity to feelings of patients, the intervention on, or participation of children, patients, vulnerable subjects should be given consideration of similar ethics analysis, even though the existence of EU law lowers the requirement for wider consensus - so conditional clearance was deemed a solution for the projects in the topic.
6. If a project aims to discover a process, product or procedure that requires validation, the file for approval by the regulator should be present at the closure of the project. The EJPRD Work-Packages on Regulation and IP need to have recourse to the appropriate documents to carry out their tasks. The ethics review is the more appropriate and logical step to draw up a list of documents setting the framework for the project document file.

7. In case an ethics "follow-up or check" is requested for EJPRD, in addition to the ethics review reports of the individual projects, and their periodic reports, as well as EJPRD's own reports, the ethics follow-up panel should have access to copies of all periodic reports. Some of these are related to scientific rather than ethical aspects, but they can be useful in identifying what has been done or is being planned in order to compare it with what the consortium has committed itself to do in the original DOW, as any changes may have ethical implications.

Ethics Review of 29 projects was carried out, and the panel confirmed that 1 of these had hESC content. The adequate requirements were added, in order to comply with H2020 rules.

Regarding the Requirements

The Panel agreed that an Ethics Advisor and contact point to the Ethics Board should be appointed by all projects, since the over-arching project EJPRD will be appointing and nominating both. The individual projects can name the common ethics advisor provided, and name someone to interact with ethics board, as responsible for collating and filing the docs.

Projects and frequent Ethics issues

All projects had ethics issues, be they issues of consent, both for clinical intervention, trials, use of human samples or personal data. In the case of projects aiming to set up networks, data bases or registries, the relevant documents should be readied to be provided to EJPRD, should the need arise. Issues of consent found in most projects, in some cases require the consent process to be clarified, or set out clearly. Typically for the present Topics, rare diseases very often diagnosed very early, there is a significant involvement of children and persons unable to give consent. The consent files should be accessible to EJPRD.

Some of the proposals cite legislation that is not the relevant EU legislation, be it because it was not current or missing, in some cases, failing altogether to recognise that clinical trials are regulated by a EU directive, and transition to the specific Regulation is expected at short notice. Moreover, the Cells and Tissues directive is under revision, and the changes expected are not planned for by most projects, even though some projects are planning quite extensive manipulation of cells and tissues.

Data Protection

GDPR also regulates the electronic support systems in which personal data is stored, and the access to raw data, and is very specific regarding export of personal data. It is mandatory to appoint a DPO and the data managent plans for treatment of personal data need to be added to the ethics file.

Animal Studies

Some animal licencing procedures described seem extremely broad (many animals, wide-ranging subject) and it is not always clear how relevant they are to a specific study. The panel observed that both in terms of documentation and also handling of ethical issues, the animal studies were better addressed than those relating to human studies. However, some projects seemed to ignore that a Directive dealing with this subject has been in force since 2010, and has had significant impact on the research using animals.

In general, the ethics section was well filled in, and a majority of projects showed a good awareness of the ethics. However, the subject matter (rare diseases) is of such sensitivity that special attention

should be paid to ensure that the requirements are complied with in full, and for the full duration of the projects.

The panel considered that requests for follow-up or check were vague, and generally opted to choose NO for the query on the desirability to include the exercise. It is, however a consideration to put to the management structures on whether to include them in the ethics framework of individual projects, particularly in the cases considered of HIGH sensitivity.

High sensitivity is a category that is determined by content of the research, not by preparedness to deal with the issue in question. It includes projects that have issues linked with vulnerable individuals or children, research using primates, human embryonic or foetal tissues and other subjects that the public could consider should be handled with particular care.

Ethics issues found in the projects reviewed

Over 50% of the 29 projects reviewed involved Children, or had more than 4 categories of issues to take into account.

Animal research is present in 16 projects.

In 19, researchers will use human samples, 3 of these intend to launch bio-banks, and at least two will use foetal tissues.

Personal data will be an issue in 20, and some of these will share personal data with third countries. This requires particular attention of the DPO.

Out of the 29, at least 20 should need to have ethics support during the life of the project, due to the delicacy of the subjects treated, rather than any specific ethics deficit.

The Panel

Rapporteur

Annexes

Panel List

Procedure

Name	E-mail	Affiliation	Expertise
Joana Namorado	joananamorado1@gmail.com	Citolab Ltd (Consultant) Fraunhofer IBMT (consultant)	MD, (Cytopath), Regulatory, EU Policy (ex Council EU), ex SO RTD Health(Cancer 2003-6,2006 -18 Ethics, ethics review, management Health Directorate)
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Procedure ethics assessment EJP RD JTC 2019

1. An ethics review board is selected. One reviewer will be named as the rapporteur of the board.
2. Each ethics reviewer is assigned 10-20 proposals for individual written review. They complete the individual review form (word document) and submit it to the JCS and the second reviewer. Each proposal is reviewed by at least 2 experts and the rapporteur.
3. The ethics reviewers and the rapporteur communicate to finalize a consensus report.
4. The ethics review will be taken into account for the proposals selected for funding. These proposals will receive the report and have will have to comply with the conditions stated in the ethics opinion. These will also be monitored in the yearly reporting.