Implementation of Egyptian Network of Research Ethics Committees (ENREC)
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Topic: International

Problem/Issue Statement

In response to an increase in health research and a recent accreditation requirement for universities, Egypt has established many research ethics committees (RECs) during the last few years. As different RECs develop in Egypt, the lack of interaction among them could lead to inconsistent practices in the review of research. Although uniformity could be fostered by national research regulations, these are not forthcoming. Accordingly, there is a need to utilize novel networking tools to augment sharing of information resources, review strategies, policies, and intellectual resources that will lead to enhanced processes for protecting research subjects.

Aim
To enhance the coordination between RECs, we aim to establish a Virtual Collaboration Network (VCN) of RECs in Egypt in order to enhance their efficiency and consistency in the review of research.

Description of Program/Research

The establishment of a network requires several steps and includes: a) distribution of a survey to obtain background information on the needs and existing resources of currently functioning RECs in Egypt; and b) the implementation of two internet tools: a web conferencing system and an internet Learner Management System to foster a communication and sharing of educational resources, respectively. Results: At the present time, the following has been performed: 1) We distributed surveys to 16 RECs and 11 completed and returned the survey. Data have been entered and data analysis is ongoing. A conference for these RECs is planned in October, 2008 and we have obtained a seminar grant from the Wellcome Trust for this conference. 2) We have gained experience with the use of WebEx (www.webex.com), an online web conferencing center, and Blackboard, an online Learner Management System (LMS). Both of these tools are tools are housed on an established website with the domain name of www.enrec.com (Egyptian Network of Research Ethics Committees). To test and assess these internet tools, we used the Webex Online Conference Center in February 2008 to broadcast a live session of an educational workshop for the REC members at Theodor Bilhariz Bilharz Research Institute to individuals in different countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (Egypt, Jordan, and Pakistan). The online conference tool has also been used to broadcast continuing educational presentations to different members of RECs across Egypt. We have used the Blackboard LMS asLMS as an Electronic Resource Center consisting of teaching of teaching materials, such as. background resource documents, research ethics codes, landmark articles in research ethics, links to other websites and forms and templates for investigators and REC members to use in the review process. We have given several individuals in Egypt passwords to gain access to the Blackboard LMS and all have successfully entered the LMS. Future Activities: The Electronic Resource Center will be further enhanced in the following manner: REC members will be able to post resources of mutual interest [e.g., articles, Investigator Application form, REC checklist for initial and continuous review, elements of informed consent as well as an example of informed consent in Arabic, Financial conflict of interest disclosure statement, Statement of confidentiality, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)]. The WebEx platform will enhance live electronic connectivity between members, making possible broadcast of REC meetings so that members can share their experiences. The Resource Center in conjunction with WebEx will also make possible online training by making research ethics literature, course content, and recorded presentations readily available and, by making available common application processes, will ensure greater consistency in the research review process; Conclusions: We have made initial steps in the formation of a network of RECs in Egypt. A baseline survey of RECs to determine needs and areas of weakness was distributed and a significant majority of the RECs completed the survey. We have also piloted tested two internet tools that will promote electronic connectivity among RECs and enhance distance learning opportunities. Our initial results demonstrate that these internet tools are useful and feasible in the Egyptian electronic environment.