

PRIMER Advancing Ethical Research Conference

2010 Uniting People, Principles, and Practices

December 6-8 | San Diego, CA | Pre-Conference Programs December 5

Effects of Implementing a Post-Graduate Course on Research Ethics; A Policy Study from Cairo University
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Topic: International

Problem/Issue Statement

Background: There is universal agreement, in the scientific community, that training in ethical aspects of research is essential to conducting high quality ethical research. In developing countries, training in research ethics is available on a very limited scope. Aim: Assess the effects of implementing a curriculum in research ethics at the Faculty of Medicine, Cairo University – Egypt.

Description of Program/Research

Methods

During the academic year 2009 – 2010, six hours of research ethics were developed and introduced in the research methodology course for postgraduate students at the Public Health Department of the Faculty of Medicine, Cairo University. This was done over a period of 3 weeks. We used a 24 item questionnaire at the beginning and end of the course to assess the effects of training. Questions evaluated knowledge of participating students on research ethics principles, functions and operations of Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), and ethical reasoning.

Results

All trainees were registered postgraduate students, of which the majority were females (84% - n=21) and had obtained a previous M.Sc. degree (76% - n=19). A total of 25 participants completed the pre-test and only 21 completed the post-test. The mean score for knowledge of the principles of ethics rose from 3.61 ± 1.46 at pre-test to 5.28 ± 0.75 at post-test; maximum 7 points with $P = 0.001$. Ethical reasoning, as assessed by questions on two case studies, also showed similar improvements from 3.33 ± 1.33 to 4.83 ± 0.38 and from 4.50 ± 0.79 to 4.94 ± 0.24 out of 5 points for case 1 and 2 respectively. These findings were statistically significant ($P \leq 0.02$). An overall score for all questions on the questionnaire showed a marked improvement in overall score from 17.56 ± 3.07 to 21.61 ± 0.98 with $P < 0.001$.

Conclusions

An initial evaluation of the effects of training showed that trainees' knowledge and ethical reasoning skills markedly improved after the course. However, we still need to assess long term effects. Next Steps: It is recommended that this curriculum continue to be implemented within the public health postgraduate course as it provides a prospect of capacity building in research ethics.