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Short Communication

Learning System of Research Ethics for EC Members in Bangladesh

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Abstract: The ethics committee (EC) promotes ethical evaluation of biomedical research to safeguard and well-being of all potential research participants. Assessment of research protocol, patient information leaflet, informed consent form, questionnaire, and any other supporting documents is a moral and legal obligation to EC. According to the WHO (World Health Organization), to be a member of EC requires a basic certification. However, this practice is uncertain in Bangladesh. This short communication highlights how EC members learn research ethics.

Key word: Research Ethics, EC, Bangladesh

Introduction: The Current population of Bangladesh is 175,702,963 according to the statistics registry of worldometer, as of July 6, 2025¹. The prevalence of death rate between 15 and 60 years is 109 per 1000 population in 2023². Therefore, Bangladesh is a high disease burden country. Also, the prevalence of clinical and health research has increased in Bangladesh. The practice of obtaining ethical clearance for research has increased as well.

However, a study shows that some EC (Ethics Committee) members are not applying their knowledge properly in Bangladesh³. Still, some EC members have dilemmas in complicated issue, such as, verbal informed consent can be taken in case of the illiterate (45%), patient's refusal in treatment should not be respected (25%), and advance directives were not helpful in dialogue among patient and family (71.83%)³. Similar results have been

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found in developing Countries⁴. EC members have difficulties in “reduced autonomy, informed consent, vulnerable population, therapeutic misconception, conflict of interest, use of placebo, distributive justice, and compensation for study-related injury and post-trial access”⁴. From the above literature, this article tries to find out the learning system of research ethics for EC members in Bangladesh.

Methodology: The Study was conducted using a literature review of both primary and secondary data. Journal articles, guidelines, and policy briefs were provided with the relevant information for this short communication. Google was the search engine to find possible literature. Key words were EC, learning, research ethics, Bangladesh, and the criteria to be an EC member.

Discussion: In Bangladesh, the duration of MBBS (Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery) is a five-year course, including one year of internships, and BDS (Bachelor of Dental Surgery) has a four-point five-year course, including a year of internships, respectively⁵. Medical ethics is taught in the 3rd year of the MBBS course and 2nd year of the BDS course at the Department of Forensic Medicine and Preventive Dental Medicine, in the medical and dental college respectively. However, ethics has been included from the 1st year to the 5th year in the medical curriculum⁵. Nevertheless, medical physicians develop their research ethics, or bioethics through self-reading and self-networking⁶.

However, medical ethics are imperative for medical professionals to care for patients⁷. But research ethics is quite different from medical ethics. Research ethics has specific rules and regulations for researchers on how to perform research activities ethically⁷. The goal of research is not to cure disease or suffering rather to gather knowledge to reduce the suffering of future patients⁸. Research hypothesizes unknown and unpracticed topics⁷. Consequently, exploitation of human subjects may occur in research by placing some people at risk for the good of others⁸. Therefore, EC members need sound knowledge of research ethics to oversee risks

to participants and make decisions on the protocols.

According to the WHO tool for benchmarking ethics, the EC members must have a legal document of expertise, e.g., training in research ethics, SOP (Standard Operating Procedure), or GCP (Good Clinical Practice)⁹. However, the National Research Ethics Committee guidelines, or Manual on Institutional Review Boards, two important national documents in Bangladesh, do not mention anything regarding the training criteria for EC member^{10,11}. IRB guidelines of medical colleges/institutes, including Bangladesh Medical University, lack of required training criteria for EC members¹². However, one IRB, the Ethics Review Committee (ERC) of Bangladesh Bioethics Society, specified in its SOP4 who can be a member of the EC and what legal training documents are required to be a member of the ERC¹³. Nevertheless, Google says “*individuals' relevant experience, expertise, and diversity to make informed decisions on research is the criterion*” to be an EC member in Bangladesh.

Conclusion: Medical doctors do not learn research ethics from the medical curriculum. They learn research ethics, or bioethics, through self-interest. To be an EC member, training on research ethics, SOP, or GCP is lacking.

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