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Ethics in Research

Credit value: 10
Semester: 1
Status: Compulsory
Contact hours: 30
Module co-ordinator: Prof Heather Draper
Lead Teacher: Prof Heather Draper

Module Description:

This module explores the ethical questions and issues that are generated by primarily clinical research, but will also look at ethical issues raised by research on animals, with a view to enabling you to be ethical researchers. It also aims to demonstrate the complexities of research ethics and to illustrate important tensions in the principles commonly appealed to in justification traditional ethical standards. For instance, it is commonly asserted that consent is a necessary pre-requisite for ethical research, yet arguments can be made that there is an obligation to take part in research that suggests consent is over-emphasised; some trials cannot be conducted with consent; and the scope of the right to consent is not easily or uncontroversially defined – e.g. in relation to human tissue or personal data. Likewise, it is not clear how generalisable some standards are; for instance when trials originating in developed countries are conducted in developing countries.

This module is delivered using a combination of lectures, group work and individual student effort. For some classes all students are expected to read pre-circulated papers in advance. The course looks at both specific issues related to particular kinds of research and those related to particular kinds of participants. It also examines the underlying ethical and philosophical theories.

Typical course content includes the following topics: content: traditional standards and principles of research ethics and challenges to these in specific contexts; ethical issues raised by certain participants, e.g. children, incompetent adults, prisoners, pregnant or potentially pregnant women, PVS patients, people in developing countries, healthy 'volunteers'; the use of stored tissue and data; autonomy in relation to payment, risk and notions of exploitation; issues related to qualitative research; defining unethical research and determining what the correct response to unethical research should be; research ethics committees; and the use of animals in research.

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Entry requirements

International students:

Depending on your chosen course of study, you may also be interested in the Birmingham Foundation Academy, a specially structured programme for international students whose qualifications are not accepted for direct entry to UK universities. Further details can be found on the **foundation academy web pages (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/foundation-academy/Pathways/index.aspx)** .

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