

HUNTER NEW ENGLAND HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE RURAL RESEARCH METHODS SUPPORT GROUP

TERMS OF REFERENCE Version : 28 May 2006

1 Purpose

To promote rural health research by providing advice to the Hunter New England Human Research Ethics Committee (HNEHREC), and researchers on methodological and other relevant issues about applications to conduct research in the rural areas of the Hunter New England Area Health Service (HNEAHS).

Rural Health Research comprises activities aimed at developing new ideas, new knowledge and new techniques and practices in rural areas. Any research requiring access to Hunter New England Health patients/clients, employees or data held by any facilities in areas defined by the Hunter New England Health boundary, but excluding the local government areas of Lake Macquarie, Newcastle, and Maitland, is deemed Rural Research.

Rural Research differs from evaluation and quality improvement activities of existing Hunter New England Health services and programs. Quality improvement activities conducted with a view to publication may require Human Research Ethics Committee review to consider their logistics, resource implications and the implications of publication of potential findings.

2. Responsibilities

- 2.1 To advise on research methods proposed by researchers for work to be undertaken within rural parts of Hunter New England.
- 2.2 To advise the Chief Executive of any resource and or clinical implications of the proposed research
- 2.3 To ensure that the proposed research does not conflict with any HNEAHS policy nor guidelines in terms of ethical and corporate behaviour
- 2.4 To act as a resource for those embarking on research
- 2.5 To ensure that the appropriate information is given regarding research sponsorship, partnerships and additional sites where the research is also being conducted
- 2.6 To advise on developing rural research capacity within HNEAHS
- 2.7 To be proactive in knowledge translation and dissemination of research findings

3 Status of the Rural Research Methods Support Group within the Organisation

The Rural Research Methods Support Group (RRMSG) is a subcommittee of the HNEHREC and established in accordance with s.26 of the Terms of Reference for the HNEHREC.

4 Composition of the Committee

- 4.1 The composition of the RRSMSG shall reflect the mix of research activities across HNEAHS. Membership is required to ensure there is a range of skills in the group to undertake appropriate review of the applications it receives. When a specialised application is before the committee, the committee may co-opt members as appropriate to reflect specialised knowledge.
- 4.2 At least one member of the RRSMSG will also be a member of the HNEHREC.

5 Appointment of Members and Terms of Appointment

- 5.1 The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson shall be selected from the membership and appointed by the HNEH Chief Executive following consultation with the HNEHREC and with other senior institutional officers, as deemed appropriate.
- 5.2 The Chief Executive shall appoint members of the RRSMSG, after consultation with the Chairs of the RRSMSG and HNEHREC, as appropriate.
- 5.3 The term of appointment for the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson shall normally be three years.
- 5.4 The term of appointment for RRSMSG members shall normally be three years.
- 5.5 Appointments may be renewed. Recommendations for renewal of appointment shall be made by the Chairperson of the RRSMSG to the HNEAHS Chief Executive, through the Director of Population Health, Planning and Performance.
- 5.6 Upon appointment, each member shall be required to sign a statement undertaking:
 - That all matters of which he/she becomes aware during the course of his/her work on the RRSMSG will be kept confidential.
 - That any conflicts of interest, which exist or may arise during his/her tenure on the RRSMSG will be declared.
- 5.7 After three consecutive non-attendances without appropriate delegation, or comments, and/or apologies members will be replaced.

6 Meetings

- 6.1 Meetings of the RRSMSG shall be held at monthly intervals from February to December, or more frequently as necessary.
- 6.2 Meeting dates shall be usually two weeks before the scheduled meeting of the HNEHREC
- 6.3 Meeting dates and agenda closing dates shall be published appropriately.
- 6.4 It may be appropriate for members to provide written comments in lieu of attendance. For the purposes of reaching decisions regarding research protocols or amendments, a quorum shall exist when 50 percent of voting members are present or the Chairperson is satisfied that members have received all papers and have had an opportunity to contribute their views and that these have been considered and recorded.

7 Procedures

- 7.1 All applications to the Hunter New England Human Research Ethics Committee involving rural research as defined at 1 will first be identified by the

HNEAHS Research Ethics Unit and forwarded to the RRMSG in the first week of each month for review.

- 7.2 A RRMSG member with any connection to or interest in an application under consideration shall absent him/herself from the meeting during the discussion and until a decision has been reached (see sub-paragraph 5.6 above).
- 7.3 The RRMSG shall reach decisions by consensus after all members have been given the opportunity to express their views. In the event that a consensus cannot be reached, a decision may be taken by voting (show of hands). A two-thirds majority shall normally be required for a decision to be made. Dissenting views shall be recorded in the minutes.
- 7.4 Written reports on reviews of applications shall be conveyed to the HNEHREC. The RRMSG shall make one of the following recommendation to the HNEHREC in relation to every application it reviews.
 - Approval
 - Provisional approval, subject to satisfactory replies to questions raised by the Committee being provided within the timeframe stipulated in the correspondence.
 - Deferral on the basis that significant changes or additional information are required
 - Not approved
- 7.5 Where approval has been recommended subject to provision by the investigator of satisfactory replies to the RRMSG's concerns, such replies will be considered by the HNEHREC, but may be referred back to the RRMSG for further advice.
- 7.6 The RRMSG may invite the investigators to a meeting to clarify outstanding issues. Alternatively the investigator can request to discuss issues with the RRMSG at their monthly meeting.

8 Responsibilities of the Secretariat

- 8.1 The Secretariat shall prepare and distribute the agenda for the RRMSG as soon as possible after the closing date for applications and at least one week before the meeting
- 8.2 The Secretariat shall be responsible for the preparation of the minutes of meetings (which shall clearly identify the application and the documents reviewed), and of correspondence arising from the minutes.
- 8.3 In the case of a deferred or rejected proposal, the Secretariat shall endeavour to notify the chief investigator of the Committee's decision within one week, and no more than ten (10) days, after each meeting.
- 8.4 The Secretariat shall store minutes of RRMSG meetings, copies of all documentation which it considers, and correspondence for a period of at least five (5) years after the completion of each research protocol considered by the RRMSG.

9 Reporting to the Hunter New England Human Research Ethics Committee

- 9.1 A written report (in the form of minutes) containing the advice on each protocol reviewed by the RRMSG shall be provided on a monthly basis, no more than three working days following the meeting.
- 9.2 The member of the RRMSG who is also a member of the HNEHREC will usually provide clarification and answer questions about the report.