



PUBLIC APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO THE HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEES

INFORMATION PACK

What is a Health and Social Care Research Ethics Committee (HSC REC)?

A HSC REC is an independent committee of the Business Services Organisation (BSO), whose task is to consider the ethics of proposed research projects which will involve human subjects, their tissue or data and which will take place, generally, within Health and Social Care (HSC) in Northern Ireland. The key duty of a HSC REC is to protect the interests of patients and other people taking part in research (Research Subjects).

Background

In February 2004, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) established Health and Social Care Research Ethics Committees (HSC RECs). The Committees comprise of both expert and lay members and are convened to provide independent advice to researchers and the wider research community on the extent to which research studies comply with recognised ethical standards. The primary purpose of a Research Ethics Committee in reviewing a research study is to protect the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of all actual or potential research subjects. Some of the areas reviewed by an HSC REC include:

- the quality of the design of the study and its merit
- the benefits and risks associated with the research
- the care and protection of the research subjects involved in the study and how they are recruited
- the clarity of written information given to research subjects to allow them to decide to take part
- the nature of the process for obtaining informed consent
- the upholding of the rights, dignity and safety of research subjects by the researcher

A wide range of research studies are presented to the HSC RECs from the clinical, biomedical and social care fields and involve research subjects who may be, for

example, children, persons with mental incapacity, persons under the care and supervision of the state and persons involved in early phase drug trials.

All HSC REC members are given training in ethical review.

The Office for Research Ethics Committees Northern Ireland (ORECNI) which is based in Lisburn, Co. Antrim, services the HSC RECs, and has a team of committee managers who provide assistance and advice to researchers who are in the process of submitting their proposals for ethical review by the HSC RECs.

The Business Services Organisation (BSO) seeks to appoint to full membership:

- **At least 2 Lay persons (a lay member generally is a person who is not from the health or allied health care professions. On this occasion there is a need for lay people who have never worked in the HSC or NHS)**
- **2 Experts (persons from a wide range of health, health care and allied health care professions; persons with experience in clinical pharmacology or registered pharmacists; persons with professional qualifications or experience relating to the conduct of or use of statistics in clinical trials; persons with professional experience in social work or social care or psychology and scientists).**

The BSO also seeks to appoint Deputy Lay or Deputy Expert members from the range of backgrounds described above.

Deputy Members deputise for main committee members, when the main member is unable to attend a meeting. They may also be called upon to provide written comments on behalf of the member for whom they are acting as deputy. However, the Deputies may also attend and participate in the meetings with the main committee member. It is expected that a Deputy Member will ultimately take up a full membership role when an appropriate position on a committee becomes available. A waiting list may be compiled.

Committee Membership - The importance of the role:

A HSC REC consists of a Chair, a Vice-Chair and up to 16 other members. Two thirds of the committee are expert members. The committees also have a number of lay members (people who are not appointed as experts). Members, whether expert or lay, are appointed as individuals in their own right to participate in the work of the REC with sound judgement. The expert members will generally be professionals working within the fields of health and social care and will bring that experience to the committee. The lay members have an important role to counter balance the expert view, as the lay person will be more in tune with the general public who ultimately are the persons taking part in research studies.

Eligibility Criteria for Lay Membership

No specific qualifications are required to be a Lay member. However, people who meet the Eligibility Criteria for Expert Membership (below) cannot be appointed as lay members.

Eligibility Criteria for Expert Membership

'Expert member' means a member of an ethics committee who:

(a) is a health care professional,

(b) has professional qualifications or experience relating to the conduct of, or use of statistics in clinical trials, unless those professional qualifications or experience relate only to the ethics of clinical research or medical treatment, or

(c) is not a health care professional, but has been a registered medical practitioner or a person registered in the dentists register under the Dentists Act 1984.

Appointments and Term of Office

All HSC REC members are appointed for a period not exceeding 5 years. Members may be appointed for periods of different duration. The period of appointment of the Chair and of any particular member shall be determined by the BSO. The Chair, Vice-Chair or a member may, on the termination of the period of tenure of office, be eligible for re-appointment for such further period, not exceeding 5 years, as the BSO may in any particular case determine. The BSO may, instead of re-appointing the Chair or a member on the expiration of their term of office, extend their appointment for such a further period as may appear reasonable in the particular circumstances. However, the period by which the appointment is extended must not exceed 5 years. Any appointed committee member can resign at any time by notifying the Head of the ORECNI.

Committee Meetings

Meetings last for around four hours and with the preparation beforehand taking at least as long as the meeting itself. Individual members may be asked by the Chair or the Committee Manager to help in preparing responses to particular points. Members receive the agenda and research ethics applications relating to new applications at least 7 days before each meeting via a secure internet based Portal. Therefore access to a computer/ or tablet device will be required to view the documents. Committees reach a decision through consensus. Health and Social Care Research Ethics Committee (HSC REC) A meets in Antrim. HSC REC B meets at the ORECNI in Lisburn.

The Commitment: HSC REC Members

Each committee meets monthly, and there are currently 10 meetings per year. Members are required to attend two thirds of the scheduled meetings each year. Although allowance is made for exceptional circumstances, there is an expectation that you should not miss more than two meetings consecutively. Committee members are also expected to attend by teleconference scheduled sub-committees; however the commitment here is less than at a full committee meeting and may be included in the overall attendance requirements.

The Commitment: HSC REC Chair

The Chairs have appropriate chairing skills and have the following responsibilities:

- Chair meetings and additional sub-committee meetings
- Be available to the HSC REC Manager (in person or by telephone on an ad hoc/daily basis). Approximately 2 hours per week in order to:
 - Check and approve minutes (drafted by the REC Manager).
 - Provide some supervision in identifying key speakers from the committee membership for each meeting.
 - Provide general guidance to the REC Manager and Committee members.
 - Convene and Chair sub-committee meetings as required (usually on a monthly basis).

NB: a member of an HSC REC may become eligible to become a Chair or Vice Chair after serving at least 1 year on committee and the appointment is subject to interview. At present we are not seeking to appoint Chairs.

Training

Training will be given to all new HSC REC members upon appointment. There will be a one day induction training course within 6 months of appointment. Training events in Northern Ireland or in Great Britain will be arranged through the course of a REC member's tenure (it is anticipated that ongoing training will equate to 1 day's equivalent per year). In addition, where a member in the course of training incurs reasonable travel, childminder or substitute carers' costs, these can be claimed as expenses. The ORECNI will be applying to the relevant bodies to have training, approved for accreditation (whether continuing professional development (CPD) or other appropriate qualifications).

All members will receive certificates of training attendance by the training providers.

Conflict of Interest

Section 7 of the Self-Nomination Form asks about Conflict of Interest. Before completing this section, refer to the booklet 'Probity and Conflicts of Interest - A guide for Candidates'. OCPANI (Enc.), as an aid to identifying any potential conflicts of interest from your life or work.

Payments, Expenses and Indemnification

There is no remuneration, as this is a **voluntary role** but your reasonable expenses will be paid. In addition, where a member in the course of committee business incurs childminder or substitute carers' costs, these can be claimed as expenses. Where a GP or community pharmacist, for example, is released from their job to attend full REC meeting, their employer may claim the costs of substituting a locum. The DHSSPS will take full responsibility for all actions of a HSC REC member in the course of his/her performance of duties other than those involving bad faith, wilful default or gross negligence. Members should, however, notify the ORECNI if any action or claim is threatened or made, and in such an event be ready to assist the DHSSPS as required.

Further information

If you wish to know more about how the HSC Research Ethics Committees' work you should contact Tamla Meredith, Denise Nesbitt or Melissa Stewart (HSC REC Managers) at telephone 028 9536 1400.

More information about ethical review in the NHS can be accessed on the website **www.hra.nhs.uk**.

Application process

Should you wish to apply to be considered for membership of the HSC Research Ethics Committees, please complete and return the nomination form available at <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/1985.htm>. Return the completed form by email to OREC.Appointments@hscni.net by **4:00pm on Wednesday 29th May 2019**.

Interviews are scheduled for Wednesday 12th June 2019.

Guidance notes on completion of the nomination form and a probity and conflicts booklet are also available on <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/1985.htm>

All candidates will have to demonstrate that they meet the following four essential criteria: making an impact with others, commitment to being a member of a committee, analytical thinking, and learning and self-development. Knowledge or experience of relevant research or ethical issues would be desirable but is not essential as training will be provided. Those candidates who, in addition, wish to be considered for the Chair's or Vice-Chair's position (should a position become available in the future) will also need to complete the leadership section of the nomination form.

Testimonials from HSC REC members

'I am a full time mother of 4 young children. From July 2010 I have acted as a lay member on an HSC REC and have thoroughly enjoyed participating. Being a member of the Committee is both fun and challenging. Both the applications and the environment in which they are discussed are both stimulating and challenging. Each individual who sits on the Committee is treated with respect and always given an opportunity to voice their concerns in relation to each application. Anyone with an interest in medical ethics and the legal implications of same would be well placed on the aforesaid Committee. '

'I am a member of an HSC REC and find the experience to be very interesting and rewarding. Being part of a very informal friendly and professional group makes me proud to serve the public.'

"I am a Lay Member; however my views, objective comments and questions within the Committee are welcomed and valued. The work is very satisfying, challenging and extremely informative; I feel that I am contributing, in a meaningful way, as a full member of Research Ethics Committee."

'I am a retired Consultant Physician who enjoys being on a Research Ethics Committee. It keeps me in touch with the latest research projects and I can sometimes suggest improvements. I appreciate the continued involvement with colleagues known during my clinical working life. It is a privilege to hear the views of others outside medicine in the excellent project discussions at Committee. The Committee Administrative system is very well organised.'

'As a busy nurse educator/researcher I sit on an ethics committee because I believe the safety of participants and researchers is paramount. On this committee I can contribute to this by ensuring that research applications are methodologically, and ethically sound, that decision-making is transparent and robust monitoring arrangements are in place to protect the rights of those involved.'

'I am a senior researcher in Biomedical Sciences so research ethics is essential to my everyday work. I enjoy being a member of the ethics committee as it provides me with an insight to the problems other researchers encounter. I believe that as I am actively involved in research I bring an expert view to the discussions that we have which help us reach our final decisions'.

'I am a lecturer within nursing and have been a member of ORECNI for the last four years. There are fifteen members within the committee that I sit on, many from various professional clinical and academic backgrounds as well as lay people. I have found the experience to provide me with a greater understanding of the research process but more importantly to fully grasp the complexities of research ethics. I feel my personal and professional contribution to the committee has been fully respected over these last years. We work as a team to make a balanced decision, thereby ensuring studies are ethically robust and that both patients and researchers are protected. The commitment of a half a day a month is not difficult and this process has strengthened my professional role both as an academic and also as a researcher. '

'As a busy nurse and researcher I enjoy my role in ORECNI because it gives me the opportunity to make a real difference.'