

International Agency for Research on Cancer



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BIENNIAL REPORT OF THE IARC INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB), 2009–2010

1. The ethical review process at IARC has been restructured in the last two years. From 2005 until 2009 there were two separate committees for ethics review at IARC:

- The IARC Institutional Review Board (IRB) was composed of nine members from a variety of backgrounds. Five members came from outside the Agency and four from the Agency staff. The IRB met every two months in Lyon to review those IARC projects which had been submitted for ethical evaluation.
- The IARC Ethics Review Committee (ERC) was composed of nine members from the international community. The role of this committee was to ensure, as far as possible, that international consistency and completeness regarding ethical approval was achieved. This committee also played an ad hoc advisory role when consulted by the IRB.

2. At its 45th Session held in January 2009, the Scientific Council requested the IARC Director to prepare recommendations to the Governing Council to adapt the ethics review process to IARC's new needs. At the 51st Session of the Governing Council, held in May 2009, the Director presented a review of the two-tier (IRB/ERC) ethics review process and the proposals for its future structure (see document GC/51/16). The Governing Council approved a Resolution (GC/51/R13) adopting the proposed changes to the ethics review process at the Agency. In particular, the Governing Council endorsed the proposal that the IARC Director would re-establish a single committee.

Activities of the former IRB and ERC

3. Under the original structure, the IRB met four times during 2009, in February, April, September and December, and reviewed 38 projects:

- 33 projects were cleared after ethical review;
- One project was given conditional approval on the understanding that certain modifications requested by the IRB had to be made before the project was given full approval;

- Three Principal Investigators were requested to provide additional information before their projects were given ethical clearance; and
- One project was not evaluated as it was considered outside the remit of the IRB.

The ERC did not meet during 2009.

Restructuring of the committee

4. Following the recommendations of the Scientific and Governing Councils, at the beginning of 2010, the ERC was dissolved and the IRB was renewed and enlarged in line with the Governing Council Resolution (GC/51/R13). The new membership comprises seven external members from diverse backgrounds, three IARC staff members and one WHO staff member:

External members

- Professor Clement Adebamowo (Nigeria), surgeon and bioethicist
- Professor Jean-Pierre Boissel (France) (Chair), retired professor of pharmacology
- Dr Béatrice Fervers (France), oncologist
- Dr Marc Guerrier (France), ethicist
- Mr Yazid Ikoumi (France), lay member
- Dr Pierre-Jean Souquet (France), surgeon
- Professor Paolo Vineis (UK) (Vice-Chair), epidemiologist

IARC and WHO staff

- Ms Evelyn Bayle (Screening Group, IARC)
- Dr Martyn Plummer (Infections and Cancer Epidemiology Group, IARC)
- Dr Abha Saxena, Geneva (Secretariat of the Ethics Research Review Committee, WHO)
- Dr Bakary Sylla (Infections and Cancer Biology Group, IARC).

5. Continuity with the previous ethical review process is provided by the presence on the new IRB of five members of the former IRB (Drs Boissel, Guerrier, Plummer, Souquet and Sylla) and one member of the former ERC (Professor Adebamowo). Consistency with ethical standards at WHO is ensured by the presence of a member of the secretariat of the WHO Research Ethics Review Committee (Dr Saxena).

IARC Ethics Advisory Group (EAV)

6. A small group of international experts has been constituted to be available to provide guidance on areas where specialist expertise might not be available within the IRB. The IARC Ethics Advisory Group (EAV) is envisaged to comprise three members whose advice will be sought on demand when considered necessary. Professor Michael Parker and Dr Rodolfo Saracci have agreed already to be part of the EAV and the agreement of a third member is currently being sought.

Activities of the Committee

7. The new IRB met for the first time in Lyon in April 2010 and has held three further meetings during the year, in June, September and November. In order to optimize participation, videoconference facilities are available for those members who are unable to attend in person. The first two meetings were dedicated to reviewing and approving the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), Rules and Procedures (RAPs) and the IRB questionnaire which IARC scientists must submit as part of their application. For this reason, project review did not begin until September 2010 which was reflected in a slight reduction in the number of projects reviewed.

8. In the September and November meetings in 2010, 22 projects were evaluated by the IRB:

- 18 projects were cleared after ethical review;
- 2 Principal Investigators were requested to provide additional information before their projects were given ethical clearance; and
- 2 projects were rejected and the Principal Investigators were asked to prepare a revision for resubmission.

9. A substantial proportion of the projects submitted to the IRB are from the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition (EPIC). The IRB reviews all EPIC projects, even when no IARC staff member is involved. It thus provides a coordinating role for ethical review across this multi-centre study.

Name change

10. During the September 2010 meeting, a decision was made to change the name of the Committee from IRB to IARC Ethics Committee (IEC) to better reflect the work carried out.