Reviewer’s report

Title: Ethics review of studies during public health emergencies - The experience of the WHO Ethics Review Committee during the Ebola Virus Disease epidemic

Version: 0 Date: 10 Dec 2016

Reviewer: Phaikyeong Cheah

Reviewer’s report:

This is an important paper that describes lessons learnt from the recent ebola outbreak. Minor comments below.

1. WHO ERC - please describe the WHO ERC and its composition (as well the EVD subcommittee). Are there any independent or lay members, how many people are in the committee? Is it a joint scientific and ethics committee?

2. Last sentence in the "Background" - "This paper describes challenges encountered and reflects lessons…" does not reflect what is in the headings/ body of the paper.

3. Pg 4, "beneficence: risks, benefits and benefit-risks ratio

   - suggest including some references e.g. how to balance risks and benefits, what are the types of risks and benefits (indirect vs direct, benefits to individual, family, community, immediate vs future)

   - please be consistent: benefit-risk ratio vs risk-benefit ratio

4. page 7, end of 3rd paragraph. Why didn't the ERC insist on protocol amendments to include pregnant women/children? Presumably it was because it did not want to delay the approval process. Did the local ECs ask for inclusion of children and pregnant women?

5. Page 7, "Informed voluntary" consent - what guidelines/reference did the ERC use? Did the ERC have its own guidelines for what constitutes "informed voluntary"? (see also the definition of "valid consent")

6. "Conclusions" - these appear to be reflections/lessons learnt/recommendations instead of conclusions

7. page 9, "framework for scientific…"

   - can you suggest a legal framework for the Joint Ethics Review Committee?

8. The paper ends rather abruptly. Suggest adding some concluding statements
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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