Reviewer’s report

Title: Why Research Ethics Should Add Retrospective Review

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Reviewer: Igor Gontcharov

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RE: Why Research Ethics Should Add Retrospective Review

This paper suggests that the current model of prospective ethics review is limited in advancing the objectives of research ethics and proposes to supplement it with retrospective ethics review. The authors argue that retrospective review is better situated in terms of thinking through actual ethical challenges. The purpose of the paper is not to offer a particular model of retrospective ethics review, or to challenge the institutions of prospective and ongoing review, but to offer an argument that retrospective ethics review may help to enhance the research ethics dimension. The authors also discuss a number of possible objections to the adoption of retrospective ethics review - cost and potential bureaucratization, redundancy, and resistance from unethical researchers.

Major limitation of the paper is that it doesn't engage with the review model in general and prospective ethics review more critically. The authors adopt the review model as an adequate mechanism of ethical governance in research involving humans. Meanwhile, much of the criticisms of prospective review would also apply to retrospective review. Why not an ethics education model, for example, continuous and reflexive? One of the ideas to consider is whether an ethics spectacle is a good approach to ethics oversight and ethical governance in general? Many alternative models of ethical governance have been proposed in the past decade and it would make sense to introduce them in a paper like this, from complete deregulation, voluntary participation, random audits, to numerous specific modifications of ethics review. Ethics review emerged as an attempt to overcome the limitations of the peer review model and withstand the pressures of research sponsors (initially government, and now also pharma and others) to advance our/their knowledge through unethical means. Has it been successful? Is the review model even capable of addressing such issues? Why do we focus on researchers rather than research sponsors? These are some of the questions that might be helpful in developing a stronger argument.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No
Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

No

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

No

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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