

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION: ETHICS OF PHARMACOLOGY

ABSTRACT

This roundtable discussion activity uses the same structure and framework as the RTD- Pain Education devised by staff at the Pain Management Research Institute, The University of Sydney. The context of the activity reflects the pharmacological content of the unit into which it is embedded. A group of stakeholders, Ethics Committee Representatives, meet to discuss a proposal for using animals in pre-clinical trials. The aim of the activity is to assess the ethical merits of the proposal from the perspective of their stakeholder positions.

KEYWORDS

Ethics; Pharmacology; Ethics Meeting; Reuse; Roundtable Discussion; Postgraduate; Online Learning; e-Learning

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DESCRIPTION

The RTD – Ethics in Pharmacology role play models an ethics committee meeting where a group of stakeholders consider an ethics proposal for pharmacological research involving animals. Each committee member is played by a small group of participants (consultant group) who collaborate to determine their stakeholder position about the ethics proposal under review. Then, one player from each group participates in the (online) Ethics Committee meeting, with external support/advice from their ‘consultant’ group. This meeting enables exploration of the merits of the proposed research and the whether or not approval to proceed should be granted. In the process, participants learn about the complexity of ethics approval processes.

AUDIENCE/GROUP SIZE

Groups from 8 to about 24 work well. Students are divided into ‘consultant’ groups and allocated 1 out of the 4 stakeholder roles to play. Smaller numbers may necessitate removal of 1 stakeholder role, whereas larger numbers may require the formation of “parallel committee meetings” of approximately equal size.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The activity provides opportunities for the development of specific and generic outcomes:

- Gain appreciation of the intricacies of ethical decision making
- Gain insights into the perspectives of other stakeholders
- Develop collaboration and negotiation skills
- Integrate and synthesise a range of information resources
- Appreciate ethical considerations associated with pharmacological research
- Appreciate the role of Ethics Committees

TIME AND SETTING

The current scenario is based in a present-day Ethics Committee Meeting concerning a contemporary pharmacological research issues. The activity is conducted over a 6 week timeframe in an elective unit of study in the Masters of Pain Management at the University of Sydney.

All aspects of the role play (briefing, ‘in role’ participant interaction, debriefing) occur in an online context.

RESOURCES

An online environment with the capacity for asynchronous/synchronous group discussion (open/private).

- Student resources include a role play briefing document; role descriptors; scenario; role-play tips; role play resources (ethics proposal/readings).
- Facilitator resources include an activity briefing; debriefing guide; a summary of ethical issues.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- Stage 1 Briefing - RTD structure/expectations, role allocation/role brief, case presentation
- Stage 2 Action - development of stakeholder position, team meeting to determine course of action
- Stage 3 Debrief – reflection on learning. 1-2 weeks allocated for debriefing activity online, using framework outlined in facilitator guide.

REUSABILITY

The activity could be remodelled for a variety of decision making contexts and for different discipline areas. The scenario could also be adapted for a setting in the past (e.g. a historical event re-examined from the perspective of present-day ethics) or the future (e.g. research in space).

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