Ethics in Research

“how to do a good job the right way”

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It may seem obvious ...

German defence minister resigns in PhD plagiarism row
Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg had been stripped of doctorate by University of Bayreuth

Helen Pidd in Berlin
The Guardian, Tuesday 1 March 2011 11.41 GMT

The Telegraph

Embryo cloning cheat resigns in disgrace
Prof Hwang Woo-suk apologises to South Korea
By Roger Highfield Science Editor
12:01AM GMT 24 Dec 2005
The world’s most successful cloning scientist, Prof Hwang Woo-suk, who was hailed as a superstar with “God’s hand” in his native South Korea, has resigned in disgrace.

... but people still make mistakes and often pay the price
Outline

What are research ethics

Why are ethics important

What are Research Attributes

Examples of ethical considerations:
  Professional conduct ethics
  Institutional ethics
  Authorship ethics
  Unethical activities

Further Resources
What are ethics

Scientific research operate within an ethical framework, some of which is unwritten and some of which is written, with varying degrees of flexibility and legal enforcement.

Research ethics are a set of principles about how researchers and research organizations should conduct themselves when dealing with research participants, other researchers and colleagues, the users of their research and society in general.

Typical considerations include:
• Recruiting study participants and informed consent
• Keeping data secure and confidential
• Making procedures, methods and findings transparent so that they can be assessed
• Safety and risk

So consult guidelines and codes of conduct relevant to the research being conducted.
Why are ethics important

Considering ethics ensures that the work is acceptable to the research community and other users of the research results.

- In order to respect and cause **no harm** to the participants
- As a sign of **respect for other researchers** and those who will use the research
- It is a **professional requirement** particularly in some disciplines and failure to do so may result in disciplinary procedures.
- It is a **requirement** to obtain funding.
- Failing to conduct research ethically could be embarrassing or result in research (or the researcher) being **dismissed or rejected** by the research community.
- Research involving human beings, including using questionnaires and focus groups, must be passed by an **Ethics Committee** whose job it is to confirm that the research conforms to a set of ethical guidelines.
Research attributes

Although there is no universal written code of conduct that all scientists must sign up to, all reputable scientists would agree some attributes govern their research.

Honesty: Do not commit fraud (e.g. fabricate, deceive, misrepresent, omit or destroy data).

Care: Avoid careless errors in scientific work, as these may have consequences ranging from unfortunate to disastrous.

Openness: Be prepared to share data, methods, hypotheses, theories, etc. at the appropriate time and in the appropriate form. Be open to receiving and acting on constructive criticism.

Intellectual freedom: The freedom to explore new ideas and to criticise old ideas, theories, etc.

Credit and acknowledgement: Give credit where credit is due. Do not plagiarise the work of other people. Always fully and clearly acknowledge the contributions of everyone involved in the research and in any publications arising out of the research.

Public responsibility: Publish and disseminate the research and its outcomes in the public domain (usually in peer-reviewed articles in reputable journals).
Responsibility of researcher

A researcher should be responsible for all actions to do with what is researched, how it is researched and with whom it is researched.

According to The European Charter for Researchers these cover:

- Research freedom
- Ethical principles
- Professional responsibility
- Professional attitude
- Contractual and legal obligations
- Accountability
- Good practice in research
- Dissemination, exploitation of results
- Public engagement
- Relationship with supervisors (and managers)
- Supervision and managerial duties
- Continuing professional development
Professional conduct **ethics**: as a person

**Conform to professional requirements**
Find out about and adhere to professional guidelines in all your research e.g. health and safety, on ethics, legal requirements, IPR and copyright.

**Be prepared**
Being well prepared for meetings will mean you get the most out of them. Part of the preparation is being punctual.

**Do your best**
You will be judged primarily on the competence and proficiency you display. In your work, avoid shortcuts. Don’t settle for mediocrity.

**Show respect, earn respect**
Earn other people’s trust by consistently meeting & exceeding their expectations.

**Be a team player**
Handle any sensitive or personal issues in private and always respect confidentiality. Give credit where credit is due and be prepared to share.

**Take responsibility**
Admit to (your part in) any mistakes, learn from them and try not to repeat them. This could include missing a deadline, miscommunication etc.

**Present yourself well**
Check communications to make sure they are courteous & error-free. Follow dress codes or conventions if they exist. Be punctual and always be polite.
Institutional responsibilities & regulation

Institutions have a responsibility to provide clear guidance on ethics. These are usually enshrined within institutional codes and policies.

Birkbeck Ethics portal: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/rgco/policy/ethics.shtml
Authorship ethics

Authorship can be seen as the academic currency, especially on peer-reviewed publications. Bear the following in mind:

Discuss authorship
It is worth discussing authorship from the beginning of any research project. In general your manager or supervisor(s) will have the last word on who are authors on a paper and in what order, but use negotiation.

Be prepared for things to change
During a project, the emphasis of the research may shift and findings may differ.

Rules on authorship vary by subject and discipline
In general, the person who has done most of the work is first author. The last author will usually be head of the group or the person whose idea it was.

Be realistic about your contribution
Many journals will now ask for a description of the contribution that each author

Keep in touch after you have moved on
Often, some of your research has not been published when you finish your research contract or doctorate and move on.

Consider acknowledgements
Although being mentioned in acknowledgement is not something people always put on a CV, it is a recognised form of attribution. Consider this both when writing your acknowledgements and when you are mentioned
Examples of unethical activities

*Although not misconduct, still unethical.*

- Submitting the same paper to **different journals** without telling the editors
- **Including a colleague** as an author on a paper in return for a favour even though the colleague did not make a serious contribution to the paper
- Trimming **outliers** from a data set without discussing your reasons in paper
- Using an inappropriate **statistical technique** in order to enhance the significance of your research
- Conducting a review of the **literature that fails to acknowledge** the contributions of other people in the field or relevant prior work
- Failing to keep good **research records** and failing to maintain research data for a reasonable period of time
- Making significant **deviations from the research protocol** approved by an ethics committee without telling the committee
- **Wasting animals** in research
- **Exposing** students and staff to health risks in violation of your institution's safety rules
- Making **unauthorised copies** of data, papers, or computer programs
Further Resources

Research ethics (Oxford University)
http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/supervision/stages/ethics/

Professional Conduct (Vitae)
https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/research-governance-and-organisation/professional-conduct-quick-tips

Ethical Principles for Research (Vitae)
https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers-professional-development/research-governance-and-organisation/ethics-in-research/ethical-principles-for-research

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences
http://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/resources/bioethics/whatis/

The student’s guide to research ethics
Paul Oliver (2010)