

WAB Newsletter



West African Bioethics

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A Newsletter of West African Bioethics Training Programme

About WAB

The West African Bioethics is program for teaching, service and research in International Bioethics

The West African Bioethics training program is unique because it uses the opportunity afforded by its location in West Africa to research and train in Bioethics in English and French languages, both of which are widely spoken in the West African subregion.

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Bioethics Seminar Meeting – Legal and Ethical Concerns in Research on Neonates

The April 2014 Bioethics Seminar was held on Thursday, 24th April 2014 at the Faculty of Law, University of Ibadan (UI). In attendance were students and staff of the West African Bioethics (WAB) Training Program, the faculties of Law, Social Sciences and Public Health of the University of Ibadan. A total of 34 people were in attendance. The presentation was given by Mrs. Lokulo-Sodipe, the Acting Head, Department of Private and Business Law, Faculty of Law, UI and a faculty member of WAB. She spoke on the topic "Legal and Ethical Concerns in Research on Neonates".



Mrs. Jadesola Lokulo-Sodipe during her lecture

In her introduction, she summarized the basic ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice. She opined that for medical research on human subjects, considerations related to the well-being of the human subject should take precedence over the interests of science and society. To ensure this, various ethical guidelines exist internationally, some of which are the Nuremberg Code (1948), World Medical Association of Declaration of Helsinki (2000), World Health Organisation, Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice for Trials on Pharmaceutical Products (1995), Council for International Organisations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS) International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Human Subjects (2002). In Nigeria, the National Code for Health Research Ethics has been in existence and use since 2007.

She further delved into defining "a child and a neonate" According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years. Medically, a neonate is a newborn from the time of delivery till the end of the first four weeks of life. Hence, a neonate is a child and according to the Rights of a Child, State Parties are responsible to take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected.



Cross section of participants



Bioethics Seminar Meeting – Legal and Ethical Concerns in Research on Neonates

contd.

Knowing how fragile neonates are, why is it necessary to carry out research on them? Mrs. Lokulo-Sodiye explained that neonates cannot be regarded as small adults, but they are unique in their development, physiology, psychology and behaviour, hence they require special management and it is essential to do research so as to improve the science and technology involved in their care and development. However, research involving children could be problematic because:

- All research involving human subjects requires the individual to provide an informed consent, which is difficult (if not impossible) for children to provide
- Children are considered a vulnerable group because of inability to protect their own interests and exercise self-governance
- International law provides additional protections for children which the State has a particular duty to protect
- The age at which a child becomes legally competent to give consent can differ substantially from one jurisdiction to another

The lecturer used the Surfactant Positive Pressure and Oxygenation Randomized Trial (SUPPORT) that was recently carried out in the United States as a case study. The aim of the trial was to find the sweet spot for oxygen concentration in treatment of infants. In this trial, neonates were randomly grouped into two groups - one group received oxygen concentration on the low end (85-89%) and the other at the upper end (91-95%) of current oxygen therapy guidelines. Infants receiving high concentrations of oxygen are at increased risk of eye diseases while the risk of mortality is higher among those receiving the lower concentration.

This study raised some ethical concerns. Was this research ethical? Given all the risks involved, why did the ethics committee approve it? Were the parents of the infants appropriately counselled on the risks and benefits of the research before they gave their consent to participate? Was there any form of inducement and or coercion in carrying out this research?



Bioethics Seminar Meeting – Legal and Ethical Concerns in Research on Neonates contd.



Cross section of participants

She concluded that ethical issues could arise from doing research on children, in particular neonates, who depend solely on their parents and the State to protect their interest. Every child has a right to life, health and dignity, and no matter the research that is being conducted, these rights should not be needlessly compromised. Researchers also have an obligation to protect neonates from harm(s) of research in their bid to discover new treatments or cures for childhood illnesses and conditions.



Training workshop for lay members of Ethics Committees



A five-day workshop was organized by the West African Bioethics Training Program (WAB), Ibadan for lay members of Health Research Ethics Committees in the South-West and South-East of Nigeria. The training curriculum was accredited by the National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC/TR/07/07/2014). The aim of the workshop was to train lay persons on how to review research protocols and provide constructive feedback to ethics committees and health researchers. The training took place from 21st to 25th July, 2014 at the Center for Bioethics, Ibadan. In attendance were twenty-three participants exclusive of the four facilitators.

Fifteen plenary sessions were taken. Sessions included history and evolution of ethics, legal, moral and philosophical foundations of research ethics, principles of research ethics, informed consent, community engagement in research, standard of care in treatment and prevention research, voluntariness and vulnerability in research and monitoring of clinical trials/research- the role of community representatives amongst others. The training used various participatory mechanisms to facilitate learning. These included brainstorming, question and answer sessions, cases studies, mock HREC session, plenary discussions, group work, games and lectures. The workshop evaluation showed that participants had indeed acquired new knowledge and skills.



Training workshop for lay members of Ethics Committees

contd.



Participants during group discussion and clinical trial terminology game



Training workshop for lay members of Ethics Committees

contd.



Participants during the Mock HREC session



Bioethics Seminar Meeting - A Neuroethical Justification of Psychoactive Enhancements: A Contextual Examination of Creativity

The July 2014 Bioethics seminar meeting was held on Thursday, 31st July 2014 at the Seminar room, Department of Surgery, University

College Hospital, Ibadan. In

attendance were West African

Bioethics (WAB) Training Program

faculty and students, as well as

consultants and residents of the

departments of Neurosurgery,

Medicine, Psychiatry,

Physiotherapy and Pharmacology.

A total of 26 people were in

attendance, inclusive of the

presenter; Mr. Afolabi, a doctoral

student of the Center for Healthcare

Ethics, Duquesne University,

Pittsburgh, USA. He presented the

topic "A Neuroethical Justification of

Psychoactive Enhancements: A

Contextual Examination of

Creativity".



In his presentation, he described

depressant and stimulant drugs as drugs that influence the human brain/mind nexus by facilitating introspection, metacognition and decision making. As such, they offer an attractive means through which creative people may accomplish tasks faster. He said in spite of this capacity to improve "creative turnaround time", the addictive and illicit nature of some of these drugs however raise ethical, legal and social concerns. Employing a neurogenetic framework, he argues that the use of psychoactive drug is consistent with the nature versus nurture interplay. However, the nuanced boundaries of acceptable psychoactive enhancement as well as the inherent addictive properties and other "harms" suggest some level of cautious restriction.



Bioethics Seminar Meeting - A Neuroethical Justification of Psychoactive Enhancements: A Contextual Examination of Creativity

Appraising the benefits and harms, he argues that this neuroethical justification equally lies in a socially embedded framework. This is because society often values and overvalues certain skills over others based on the perceived relevance or contribution such skills may have on collective welfare. The derivation of socially useful values from psychoactive enhancements thus validates their use for creativity-related tasks. However, since

accessibility to controlled psychoactive drugs often constitutes a legal matter, he addresses the moral tensions raised by a neuroethical justification in relation to legal statutes. In this vein, he extricates and explicates the diverse hermeneutics underlying the harms of psychoactive enhancements.

He concluded by underscoring the need for legal change vis-à-vis approving the selective use of psychoactive substances on the utilitarian grounds for the greater societal good. He said the legal change will however rest on the structure, tenor and tone of prevailing societal norms and values.

The audience raised their concerns about his presentation and many

argued that addictive and social implications of psychoactive drug use are still cogent reasons why their use is not justifiable for enhancement purposes. It was concluded that this scenario is still being researched and with adequate information from research, a conclusion will be reached in the nearest future.





Bioethics Baby

The entire members of staff and students of WAB rejoice with our current MSc. Bioethics student, Mrs. Nkem Abiodun who delivered a baby girl on the 15th of April 2014. She wishes to say a big thank to all staff for supporting her during the pregnancy period and ensuring that her condition did not sabotage the opportunity she has as a Bioethics scholar. Mrs. Abiodun is currently working on her research project. She is coping well and she gets enough support from all in pursuing her career.

Dr. (Mrs.) Morisola Ogundipe, the Program administrator, on behalf of WAB presented a gift to her baby.





Sales of application form for the 2014/15 academic session - MSc. Bioethics program at the University of Ibadan postgraduate school

Application form for the University of Ibadan postgraduate school for the 2014/15 academic session is currently on sale. Individuals who are interested in the MSc. Bioethics program should be apply through the UI postgraduate school website: <http://pgschool.ui.edu.ng/>

Please note that application commenced on Wednesday, August 20, 2014 and would last for EXACTLY six (6) weeks.

For further enquiries, please contact us on admin@westafricanbioethics.net



CLOSING REMARKS

Thank you for taking your time to read the issue of the newsletter, Your comments about the current issue, and ideas for the next issue are what will keep the West African Bioethics Newsletter an interesting and lively newsletter!!

Please send contributions and suggestions to **admin@westafricanbioethics.net**

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