

# Ethics of psychiatric research

Executive of the Faculty of Academic Psychiatry  
of the Royal College of Psychiatrists

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The Faculty of Academic Psychiatry endorses the General Medical Council supplementary guidance, *Good Clinical Practice in Research and Consent in Research*, and embraces the principles embodied in the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Council Report, *Guidelines for Researchers and for Research Ethics Committees on Psychiatric Research Involving Human Participants* (CR82). The following are issues that merit particular emphasis.

- 1 Research can bring major benefits to individuals, health services, and to society at large. Arguably, there is a greater need for research in psychiatry than in any other medical specialty. Whenever and wherever possible, ethically sound, high-quality research should be facilitated.
- 2 Patients have the right to know about ethically approved and high-quality research for which they may be eligible and for which they may be offered the opportunity to take part.
- 3 The principles underlying the ethical conduct of research in psychiatry are the same as apply to other branches of medicine. Research in psychiatry must be held to the same high ethical standards as other medical research. It is important that additional barriers are not placed in the way of the conduct of research in this area.
- 4 The capacity to give consent to participate in research is task and time specific. Although certain individuals with psychiatric disorders may at times lack the capacity to consent, the vast majority of people with a mental illness have the right to decide for themselves whether or not they wish to take part in a study.
- 5 There are specific groups of individuals in psychiatric research who require additional safeguards – those with intellectual disabilities, detained patients, prisoners, children or vulnerable groups such as refugees, are examples. It is important that there is no actual or perceived coercion to participate.
- 6 Whenever possible, patients should be empowered to participate in research if they wish to do so.
- 7 Work must be done to foster an active and positive research culture in mental health services. It is important to challenge the common, but erroneous and stigmatising, view that research in psychiatry entails greater risk and has less potential benefit than research in other areas of medicine.
- 8 To avoid erroneous and stigmatising assumptions, the deliberations of ethics committees should be facilitated by direct advice from those experienced in clinical work and research in the relevant area(s).

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