Ethics First: A Student's Guide to ERC Applications and Responsible Research

Understanding the importance of ethics in research and how to navigate the ERC process smoothly

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Faculty of Applied Sciences
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Outline of today's work

- Introduction to Research Ethics
- Why it is important
- What is ERC Approval? Why does it matter?
- How you can apply?
- Completing the application form: Step by step guidelines
- Research proposal
- Study Instruments
- Information sheet and consent forms
- Study Assessment form
- Q and A session

What is Research Ethics?

Definition

- Research ethics refers to the moral principles guiding responsible conduct in research.

Core Values:

- **Respect:** respecting participants' privacy, obtaining informed consent, and honoring their decisions.
- **Integrity:** Acting honestly and ethically at all times
- **Transparency:** Being open and clear about processes.
- **Accountability:** Taking responsibility for your actions and their consequences.

What is Research Ethics?

Example: The Facebook Emotional Contagion Study (2014)

In 2014, Facebook conducted a study to see if changing users' newsfeeds would affect their emotions. Over 600,000 users had their feeds altered — without their informed consent.

Why it raised ethical concerns:

1. No consent from participants
2. Psychological manipulation without awareness
3. No clear mechanism for accountability

Why is Research Ethics Important?

Research ethics ensure that:

1. **Human dignity, rights, and safety** are protected
2. **Scientific integrity** is maintained through honesty and transparency
3. **Trust** is built between researchers, participants, and the public
4. **Misconduct** such as plagiarism or data falsification is prevented
5. **Compliance** with legal and institutional standards is ensured

Applies to research involving:

→ **Human subjects**, **animal subjects**, **publications**, and more

Human Subjects – What Research Ethics Means

When your research involves people (like interviews, surveys, or experiments), ethics helps make sure you treat them with respect and care.

✔ **Key Principles :**

- **Respect their dignity:**
  Treat people kindly and fairly. Don't embarrass or pressure them.
- **Informed consent:**
  Always tell them what the research is about — and get their clear permission to take part.
- **Voluntary participation:**
  They should join only if they want to, and they can stop at any time without penalty.
- **Anonymity & confidentiality:**
  Keep their information private. Don't share names or personal details unless they agree.
- **Avoid harm:**
  Make sure your research doesn't cause emotional or physical harm.

Think of ethics as treating people in your research the way you'd want to be treated — with honesty, respect, and care

Animal Subjects – What Research Ethics Means

When research involves animals (e.g., lab studies or behavioral experiments), ethics helps make sure animals are treated with care and respect.

✔ **Key Principles :**

- **Be kind and humane:**
  Treat animals gently. Avoid causing pain or stress.
- **Only use animals when necessary:**
  Use animals only if there's no other way to get the results.
- **Follow proper rules:**
  Stick to approved methods and guidelines for caring for animals.

Just like people, animals used in research deserve kindness and protection.

Publication Ethics – What Ethics Means

When you publish your research, ethics ensures your work is honest, original, and trustworthy.

✔ **Key Principles :**

- **Don't copy (no plagiarism):**
  Always give credit when using someone else's work or ideas.
- **Don't fake data:**
  Never make up results or change data to look better.
- **Be fair with authorship:**
  Only list people who actually contributed to the work.
- **Be honest and open:**
  Share how you did the research so others can understand or repeat it.

Good research is not just about good results — it's about being honest, fair, and responsible.

What Is ERC Approval – and Why Does It Matter?

ERC approval means your research has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Review Committee — to make sure it respects and protects the people (or animals) involved.

✔ Why is it important?

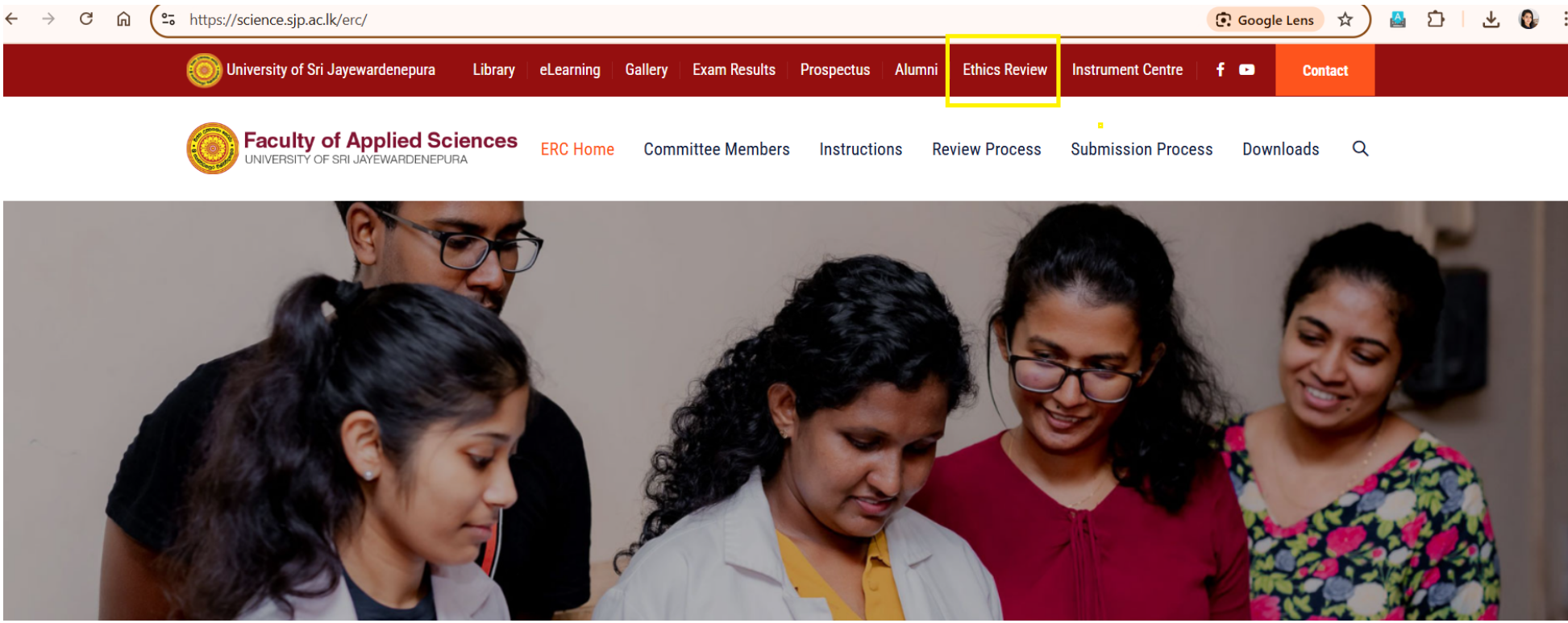
- Shows that your research is ethical and responsible
- Protects the rights and safety of participants
- Required for thesis submission and publication
- Builds credibility and trust in your work

Now that you know why ERC approval is important, let's look at how you can apply for it — step by step.

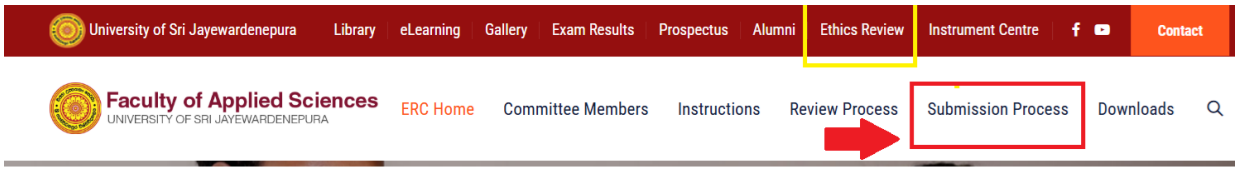
How you can Apply?

We have an Ethics Review Committee at Faculty of Applied Sciences, SJP

https://science.sjp.ac.lk/erc/



How you can Apply?



Go to the **Submission Process** Tab and you will find the **Documents to be submitted**

1. Covering letter signed by the applicant
2. **Fully completed application form**
3. Research proposal
4. Study instruments (if applicable), – in all three languages
5. Information sheets, and consent forms (if applicable)- in all three languages
6. Recommendation of the supervisor (if applicable)
7. Bank receipt

PART A: Administrative Details

1. Title of Research Project:

2. Details of Principal Investigator

Title (Prof./Dr./Mr/Ms):	Name:
Current designation and name and address of the institution where the applicant is attached:	
Highest educational qualification of applicant:	
Mailing address:	
Phone:	e-mail:

ERC Application Form Contd..

3. Details of Co-Investigator/s

Title (Prof./Dr./Mr/Ms):	Name:
Current designation and name and address of the institution where the applicant is attached:	
Highest educational qualification of applicant:	
Mailing address:	
Phone:	e-mail:

4. Information on the study programme

4.1. Type of study programme

Undergraduate ☐ Postgraduate ☐ Other ☐ Please specify: .....

If this is a postgraduate programme, provide the following information

4.2. Have you already registered for this degree? Yes ☐ No ☐

ERC Application Form Contd..

4.3. Details of the degree programme

Type of degree (MSc/PhD/MD/MS/other):		
Awarding University:		
Date of registration:	Date of protocol approval by the board of study:	Letter annexed ☐

Please append a letter of approval from the Board of Study

5. Details of Supervisors

Title:	Name:
Department (or organization if not affiliated with FAS/SJP):	
Highest educational qualification:	
Mailing address:	
Phone:	e-mail:

ERC Application Form Contd..

6. Information on research sites/ location:

6.1 Is this a multi-site study? Yes ☐ No ☐

6.2 Specify all study sites

If the research is to be conducted at a site requiring administrative approval/consent (e.g., in a hospital/school). In that case, it is the responsibility of the researcher/s to obtain approval prior to starting the project.

Type of site (University, Community, School)	Details

7. Information on approval from other research ethics boards

7.1 Has any other ERC approved of this project? Yes ☐ No ☐

ERC Application Form Contd..

8. Funding information

Funding Status		**Source and the amount**	**Details**
1. Funded			
2. Applied for Funding			
3. Unfunded			

ERC Application Form Contd..

PART B: Research Details

9. Title of the project:

10. Start and end dates of the project

Estimated date of commencement:

Estimated date of completion:

11. A summary of the research proposal (maximum 250 words)

12. Scientific significance of your study to improve knowledge of the subject

13. Justification for a replication study (only if your study is a replication study)

ERC Application Form Contd..

14. Investigators' experience with this type of research

(If there is no prior experience, please describe the training or preparation plan for the principal investigator and research team to ensure they are properly equipped for the study)

15. Are the facilities at the site adequate to support the study? Yes ☐ No ☐

16. Plan for dissemination of study findings

ERC Application Form Contd..

17. Respect for the dignity of the research participants

	Informed consent Criteria	Applicable		Provide details
		Yes	No	
1	Procedure for obtaining informed consent	☐	☐	
1	Type of consent obtained*			
	Verbal	☐	☐	
	Written	☐	☐	
2	Procedure for ensuring the understanding of the information provided to participants	☐	☐	
3	Procedure for withdrawing consent	☐	☐	
4	Information on incentives/ rewards/ compensation to participants.	☐	☐	
5	Re-consent procedure if the research protocol changes during the research.	☐	☐	
6	Consent procedure if recruiting vulnerable groups /children under 18 years of age	☐	☐	
7	Consent procedure if children between the ages of 12-18 are recruited (For children between 12-18 years, in addition to parental consent, children's consent must be obtained) **	☐	☐	

**If written please include a consent form with translations. If verbal, please state in simple words (in Sinhala / Tamil / English) in a separate sheet what information you would convey to the participants and state below how*

ERC Application Form Contd..

18. Confidentiality

Criteria		Applicable		Provide details
		Yes	No	
1	Methods for collecting data/samples*	☐	☐	
2	Duration for retaining data/samples	☐	☐	
	Information and justification for the sample size	☐	☐	
3	Justification for collecting personally identifiable data	☐	☐	
4	Persons authorized to handle the personal data of research participants	☐	☐	
5	Measures to safeguard the confidentiality of participants	☐	☐	
6	Data and sample storage procedure	☐	☐	
7	Data and sample disposal procedure	☐	☐	

**Please provide adequate proof to show that clinical samples (where applicable) are collected by appropriate health care professionals.*

**Please include questionnaires or other forms used (in Sinhala/Tamil/English).*

ERC Application Form Contd..

19. Fair participant selection

Criteria		Applicable		Provide details
		Yes	No	
1	Description of the study population	☐	☐	
2	Justification for the selection of the study population.	☐	☐	
3	Procedure for initial contact and recruitment of participants	☐	☐	
4	Justification for participant selection to ensure minimized risks, maximized benefits, and fair distribution of research burden	☐	☐	

ERC Application Form Contd..

20. Vulnerable groups (those socially disadvantaged on account of illiteracy, economic status, social status, etc., and those with limited autonomy such as prisoners, service personnel, etc.)

Criteria		Applicable		Provide details
		Yes	No	
1	Involvement of vulnerable groups	☐	☐	
2	Justification for using the vulnerable group instead of the general population.	☐	☐	
	procedure for withdrawal from research due to refusal (dissent) of the research participant	☐	☐	
3	Procedure for making the research results available to this population	☐	☐	

ERC Application Form Contd..

21. Community-based research

Criteria		Applicable		Provide details
		Yes	No	
1	Impact and relevance to the community in which research is to be conducted	☐	☐	
2	Steps taken to consult with the relevant community in designing the research	☐	☐	
3	Procedure/s used to obtain community approval	☐	☐	
4	Contribution to capacity building of the community	☐	☐	
5	Procedure for making the results of the research available to the community	☐	☐	

ERC Application Form Contd..

Questions 22 to 27 mainly apply to projects that require observation, capturing, and handling of animals in the field.

22. Details of the study site/s

22.1. Location/s of the study:

22.2. Does this area fall within any protected area? Yes ☐ No ☐

22.3. If **'Yes'**, specify.

23. Details of the animal subjects

23.1. Species being studied:

Scientific name:

Common name:

23.2. Status of the species (e.g. nationally threatened, rare, endemic):

23.3. Information and justification for the sample size

ERC Application Form Contd..

24. Details of the sex and age groups included in the study.

25. Handling and capturing

25.1. Would you need to capture and handle the animal(s)? Yes ☐ No ☐

If **'Yes'**, answer to following questions

25.2. Purpose of capturing and handling the animals/s

25.3. Briefly outline the capture method

25.4. Provide proof that the capturing and handling procedures follow standard methods used for studying these animals

ERC Application Form Contd..

25.5. State any previous experience in using the method/s.

25.6. Any plan for removing captured animals from the environment in which they are captured. Yes ☐ No ☐

25.7. If yes, explain the arrangements made to ensure the safe and optimal transportation of the animals

25.8. Provide details about the animals' housing conditions during captivity a the length of their captivity

25.9. Outline the welfare arrangements for captive animals

ERC Application Form Contd..

25.10. Specify the disposal/release methods of animals after the experiment.

25.11. Briefly explain the measures to treat animals in case of injuries during capturing or handling.

26. Tranquilization

26.1. Are you going to tranquilization of animals Yes ☐ No ☐

26.2. If **'Yes'**, answer the following questions

26.3. Describe the method(s) proposed for tranquilization

26.4. Provide proof that the tranquilization procedure follows standard methods used for studying these animals

ERC Application Form Contd..

27. Observation of animals

27.1. Does your study require night sampling? Yes No

27.2. Describe the measures you have taken to minimize disturbance to the animals in the field

28. Collaborative partnership/s

Criteria		**Applicable**		**Provide details**
		Yes	**No**	
1	Collaborations you have established with institutions where the study is to be conducted	☐	☐	
2	Collaborations you have established with the community where the study is to be conducted	☐	☐	
3	Benefits to institutions, communities, and participants of your research	☐	☐	

ERC Application Form Contd..

29. Responsibilities of the researcher

Criteria		Applicable		Provide details
		Yes	No	
1	Provisions for follow-up care after research	☐	☐	
2	Declaration of conflicts of interest and strategies to address and manage them	☐	☐	
3	Ethical, legal, social, and financial issues relevant to the study	☐	☐	

ERC Application Form Contd..

30. Research funded by foreign agencies/companies

Criteria		Applicable		Provide details
		Yes	No	
1	Justification for conducting the study in Sri Lanka	☐	☐	
2	Relevance of the study to Sri Lanka	☐	☐	
3	Post-research benefits to Sri Lanka	☐	☐	
4	Measures taken into account cultural and social customs, practices, and taboos in Sri Lanka	☐	☐	
5	Distribution of intellectual property rights	☐	☐	
6	Disposition of data and biological samples, including whether they will be sent overseas and their handling after the study concludes.	☐	☐	
7	Methods for communicating the research findings to relevant authorities in Sri Lanka	☐	☐	
8	Agreement between the sponsor or funding agency and the investigator	☐	☐	Please Attach
9	Materials transfer agreement, if biological materials are to be transferred overseas	☐	☐	Please Attach

ERC Application Form Contd..

PART C: Description of risks and benefits

31. Assessment of Risks and Benefits

31.1. Is the participation of human/animal subjects necessary to obtain the Required information? Yes ☐ No ☐

31.2. Please indicate all potential risks to participants of their involvement in the project

i. Physical risks Yes ☐ No ☐

ii. Psychological risks Yes ☐ No ☐

iii. Social risks Yes ☐ No ☐

iv. Legal risks: Yes ☐ No ☐

31.3. If **'Yes'** to any of the above, please elaborate.

ERC Application Form Contd..

31.4. Specify the measures implemented during the project to eliminate or reduce these risks.

31.5. Describe any potential benefits to participants/ communities of their involvement in the project

31.6. Comment on the potential benefits to the scientific or scholarly community as well as to society that would justify individuals' participation in this study.

31.7. Justify the potential benefits against the risks.

ERC Application Form Contd..

32. Compensation

32.1. Will participants be compensated for their involvement in this study?

Financial	Yes ☐	No ☐
In-kind	Yes ☐	No ☐
Other	Yes ☐	No ☐

32.2. If **'Yes'**, please provide details of the compensation and the reasoning behind the amount or value offered.

32.3. If '**No**', please explain why compensation is not possible or inappropriate.

32.4. If participants decide to withdraw, how will their compensation be impacted?

ERC Application Form Contd..

33. Potential for a conflict of interest in the project.

33.1. Commercially

33.2. Financially

33.3. Intellectually

33.4. Other (Explain)

34. Does any member of the research team have an affiliation with the funder/sponsor(s) or a financial interest in the research results? Yes ☐ No ☐

If **'Yes'**, please explain:

35. If a duality of interest is identified, describe the nature of the interest and determine whether it presents a potential conflict of interest.

ERC Application Form Contd..

PART D: Declaration and consent

36. Declaration of applicant

- As the Principal Investigator for this project, my signature confirms that I will ensure all procedures carried out under the project comply with all relevant national and international policies and regulations.
- I understand that any deviation from the originally approved project must be submitted as an amendment to the ERC for approval before implementation.
- I have provided all relevant previous decisions made by this or any other ERC and/or regulatory authorities of the proposed study.
- I declare that I am not seeking approval for a study that has already begun or has already been completed.
- I understand that a minimum of two months is required for the ethics review and the granting of ethics clearance.
- I will submit progress reports, reports on adverse events, and side effects, as requested by the ERC/FAS.
- I will submit the final report upon completion of the study.

.....

Signature of Principal Investigator Date :___ /____/_____

Full name of Principal Investigator:

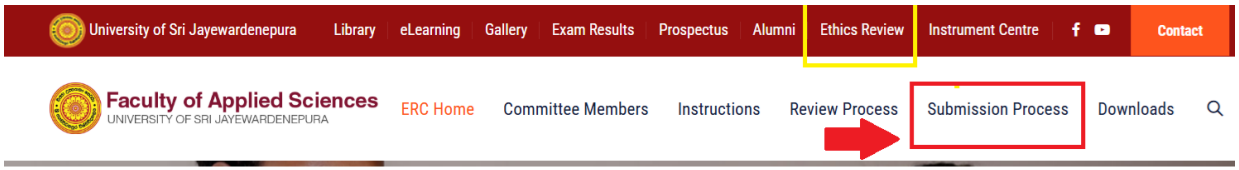
ERC Application Form Contd..

37. Consent from all Investigators

We, the undersigned, hereby confirm that we have agreed to be co-investigators for the project titled

Name	Qualifications	Institutional Affiliations	Signature

ERC Application + What else?



Go to the **Submission Process** Tab and you will find the **Documents to be submitted**

1. Covering letter signed by the applicant
2. **Fully completed application form**
3. **Research proposal :** Although you provide all the information in the research proposal, it is mandatory fill the ERC application with all necessary details. If some sections are too lengthy, you may mentions those specific sections in the proposal appropriately in the application.

ERC Application + What else?

4. **Study instruments** (if applicable), – in all three languages
   - In an ethical clearance application, study instruments refer to the **specific tools or materials you will use to collect data from participants**.
   - These instruments must be clearly identified and submitted (or described) as part of the ethics application because they are central to assessing whether
     - the study poses any risks to participants
     - informed consent is properly obtained.
   - Common Study Instruments (Examples):

     4.1 Questionnaires / Surveys

     4.2 Interview Guides

     4.3 Data Collection Forms / Case Report Forms (CRFs)

ERC Application + What else?

5. **Information sheets, and consent forms** (if applicable), – in all three languages

   5.1 **Information Sheet (Participant Information Sheet – PIS)**

   This document provides clear and detailed information about the research study to potential participants.

   Purpose: To help participants understand:

   - What the study is about
   - What is expected from them
   - Any risks or benefits
   - Their rights (e.g., to withdraw at any time)

   5.2 **Consent Form**

   This is a document that the participant signs to indicate they have read and understood the information sheet and agree to participate in the study.

   Purpose: To provide documented evidence of informed consent.

Most Important - How we access your application

Ethics Review Committee
Faculty of Applied Sciences
University of Sri Jayewardenepura
Gangodawila, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka

STUDY ASSESSMENT APPLICATION FORM

Application No: ERC xxx/2025	Date Received (D/M/Y):
Reviewer's name:	

No	Criteria	Yes	No	NA	Comments
1	Will the study contribute to improvements in human or animal health, well-being, or the advancement of science?				
2	Is the background and justification sufficient?				
3	Are the objectives of the study clearly stated?				
4	Is there a plan for disseminating the research results?				
5	Is the need for human or animal involvement properly justified?				

Most Important - How we access your application

6	Should the study be referred to a technical expert, policy maker, or statistical expert?				
7	Is the study design appropriate?				
8	Do sample size and statistical techniques have sufficient power to produce reliable and valid results?				
9	Do the investigators have the necessary qualifications, competence, and experience?				

Most Important - How we access your application

10	Are the facilities at the study site adequate to support the research?				
11	Are the inclusion criteria appropriate?				
12	Are the exclusion criteria appropriate?				
13	Is voluntary participation ensured?				
14	Are privacy and confidentiality protected?				
15	Are risk and benefit assessments satisfactory?				
16	Are the procedures for obtaining informed consent appropriate?				
17	Is the content of the information sheet and consent form clear?				
18	Is the procedure for obtaining proxy consent adequate?				
19	Is the procedure for dealing with adverse events adequate?				

Most Important - How we access your application

20	Are the criteria for trial termination detailed?				
21	Will the benefit of the research be made reasonably available to this group?				
22	Is there any inducement for participation?				
23	Are the translations of all forms consistent?				
24	Will fresh informed consent be obtained if procedures change?				
25	Will the researcher collect only the minimum information or samples necessary to fulfill study objectives?				
26	Is the safe disposal of biological/chemical samples assured?				

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Q & A