



Provincial Health Services Authority

## UBC BC Cancer Research Ethics Board

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## BC Cancer Research Ethics Board Guidance for Student Research

The purpose of this guidance is to outline the principles and procedures relating to the ethical review and conduct of student research which uses human participants (see definition below) and is undertaken at BC Cancer.

### Definitions

**Human participants:** The Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2) defines human participants as *“those individuals whose data, or responses to interventions, stimuli or questions by the researcher, are relevant to answering the research question”*. Human participants are also referred to as "participant," and in other policies/guidance as "subject" or "research subject."

Ethical review applies to all research involving:

- living human participants, and
- human biological materials (including tissues, organs, blood, plasma, skin, serum, DNA, RNA, proteins, cells, hair, nail clippings, urine, saliva, and other body fluids), as well as human embryos, fetuses, fetal tissue, reproductive materials and stem cells.

**Principal Investigators (PIs):** bear the overall responsibility for the conduct of the student research project, including the activities of student researchers, co-investigators, and others on the study team. As the individual responsible for the implementation of the research, the principal investigator bears direct responsibility for ensuring the protection of every research participant.

**Research:** Article 2.1 of TCPS2 defines research as *“an undertaking intended to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry and/or systematic investigation. The term ‘disciplined inquiry’ refers to an inquiry that is conducted with the expectation that the method, results, and conclusions will be able to withstand the scrutiny of the relevant research community.”*

**Student research:** is defined as any directed or independent research which is intended to contribute to generalizable knowledge, and is conducted by undergraduate or graduate students in order to satisfy course or degree requirements (ie undergraduate research projects and honors theses, masters' theses, and dissertations).

Student researcher\*: an individual who is enrolled at an academic institution and is conducting directed or independent research which is intended to contribute to generalizable knowledge, and is conducted in order to satisfy course or degree requirements (ie undergraduate research projects and honors theses, masters' theses, and dissertations).

Supervisor: a faculty member who mentors a graduate student in their research.

Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2): is a joint policy of Canada's three federal research agencies – the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), or “the Agencies.” This Policy expresses the Agencies' continuing commitment to the people of Canada to promote the ethical conduct of research involving humans.

### **Guiding principles and procedures**

Article 6.1, TCPS2 states “*Institutions shall establish or appoint REB(s) to review the ethical acceptability of all research involving humans conducted within their jurisdiction or under their auspices, that is, by their faculty, staff or students, regardless of where the research is conducted, in accordance with this Policy.*” Student Researchers must receive ethics approval prior to engaging in research activities at BC Cancer and must maintain approval throughout the research activity (see Continuing Review below). In the majority of cases, student research must be reviewed and approved by both your University's Research Ethics Board and the BC Cancer REB. It is the responsibility of the Student Researcher to ascertain both their University's and BC Cancer's ethics approval requirements prior to commencement of any research activity at BC Cancer. **Failing to obtain research ethics approval could have serious implications for your thesis or dissertation defense and your ability to graduate as Research Ethics Boards cannot issue retroactive approvals which we want to avoid.**

As a University of British Columbia (UBC) affiliated Board, the BC Cancer REB is governed by UBC Policy #89 – Research Involving Human Participants, as well as the TCPS2. Any student conducting research with human participants is required to:

- 1) Complete the TCPS tutorial 'CORE' (<http://tcps2core.ca/welcome>). This is an online tutorial that takes approximately 3 hours to complete.
- 2) Obtain institutional ethics approval from their own University Research Ethics Board, and the BC Cancer REB (or a UBC-affiliated Research Ethics Board) PRIOR to conducting their research.

The procedure to obtain ethics approval may differ depending on the status of the project and the student's role.

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\* BC Cancer employee/intern who are also student researchers: Please be aware that access to patients, other employees, data, samples, records, documents, etc. that you may have in your employment or intern role with BC Cancer does not give you the right to access these people, data, samples, records, documents, etc. for student research purposes. It is your responsibility, and your Supervisor's, to seek appropriate advice before undertaking any research activities.

### **Amendment: Student is added as a team member to an already approved BC Cancer project**

A student can be added as a team member to an already REB approved BC Cancer project via submission of an amendment in the following circumstances:

- If their supervisor has a BC Cancer affiliation AND is a PI or Co-I on the project; AND
- If the work being undertaken by the student is not for the sole purpose of conducting directed or independent research (eg completing a thesis or capstone project), but rather the student is acting in the role of a research assistant or collaborator on the current project, or is undertaking a co-op or work experience placement (the activity being undertaken by the student and the duration is taken into account – please contact the REB for advice); OR,
- If the work being undertaken by the student is for the sole purpose of fulfilling course or degree, but the student is undertaking a component of the already approved study. If any component of the approved project is being changed or added (eg new or additional hypotheses, questionnaires, participant groups, methodology, etc) in order to fulfill the thesis requirements of the student, a new application for ethics approval must be submitted.

### **New ethics application**

If the circumstances do not conform to the above – Approved BC Cancer project: Adding a student as a team member via amendment (eg **new or additional** hypotheses, questionnaires, participant groups; a project not yet reviewed/approved by a REB, etc.) a new application for ethics approval must be submitted. Harmonized review may be possible for newly submitted student projects (see <https://researchethicsbc.ca/provincial-research-ethics-platform-launches-in-bc/>). **It is the student's responsibility to seek advice** about harmonized review from their University's Research Ethics Board who may contact the BC Cancer REB directly to discuss.

In all cases, students must provide the following information with their submission:

- details of the course/degree they are undertaking the research for;
- a protocol or outline of their research project;
- peer review (thesis committee approval is deemed to be sufficient evidence of peer review). In cases where there are no thesis committees or formal approval procedures, a letter signed by the project supervisor indicating that the proposed methodology has been reviewed and approved must be submitted along with the application form. This letter serves to replace the peer-review process of a thesis committee.
- If applicable, grant funding applications and approvals associated with your study.

## **Other circumstances**

BC Cancer data/bio banks: Separate ethics approval must be sought for all individual research projects that seek access and use of data/tissue from a BC Cancer data or bio bank.

Quality Assurance (also referred to as Quality Improvement or Program Evaluation): Although Quality Assurance is generally exempt from institutional ethics review, if you are conducting a quality assurance activity for the purpose of your dissertation, it is deemed to have crossed the line into research and therefore requires institutional ethics review.

## **Hints and tips for submissions**

Question 1.1 (Principal Investigator): Your supervisor must be the PI on the application, because they take primary responsibility for the study. The Primary Investigator must also satisfy BC Cancer REB PI requirements <http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/our-research/ethics-oversight/research-ethics-board/application-review>.

Question 1.2 (Primary contact): ensure you are listed as the primary contact.

Question 1.3 (Co-investigators): ensure you are listed as a co-investigator.

Question 5.1 (Research summary): Make it clear that the study is being conducted for dissertation purposes.

Don't cut and paste from your research proposal - the ethics application requires concrete and specific information of a very different order to the higher-level, 'big picture' requirements of research proposals. Try to be as concise as possible by ensuring the reviewer does not have to sift through irrelevant information, but ensure that you provide enough detail – especially regarding what will happen to participants in your study.

## **Continuing review**

Student research must follow the practices of Continuing Review, which includes submitting an Annual Renewal form before the expiry date, and submitting a Study Completion Report at the conclusion of the project. Any significant change to the protocol must be reported, through submission of an Amendment Form.

Please contact the BC Cancer REB if you have any questions: [reb@bccancer.bc.ca](mailto:reb@bccancer.bc.ca)