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By Linda Nordling

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[Global Code of Conduct](#)

Guidelines hope to stop 'ethics dumping' in poor countries

A code of conduct that aims to curb the practice of ethics dumping, whereby scientists conduct studies in poor countries that would not be permitted in their own, has been published this month.

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The Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings, launched on 15 May, has been developed over three years with funding from the European Union. It was inspired by high-profile incidents like that a few years ago, when a British neuroscientist travelled to Kenya to conduct research on non-human primates that would have been banned in Europe.

The code centres on four central values: fairness, respect, care and honesty. Each 'value' comes with several articles. Article 4 under 'fairness' states that local researchers should be included, where possible, throughout the research process all the way from study design to authorship.

It says that where regulations are lacking in a country in which research is going to be carried out, researchers should adhere to the same high standards they would at home. For instance, where animal welfare laws are lacking in a LMIC setting the rules from the researchers' country of origin should apply.

Under 'honesty' it says that low educational standards, illiteracy or language barriers can "never excuse" researchers withholding information from participants. "Information must always be presented honestly and as clearly as possible," it says.



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The code is neither region- nor subject-specific. That distinguishes it from other recently published codes, like the San Code of Research Ethics published in March last year drawn up by representatives of the San people of South Africa, or the Framework for Best Practice for Genomics Research and Biobanking in Africa published on 18 April.

Next month the European Commission will consider whether to include the code as a guidance document for all the research it funds. If that happens, it will be the second code of conduct to make this list of ethics reference documents, the other being the [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#) from 2017.

"It would be a major thing to be part of this list," says Doris Schroeder, an ethicist from the University of Central Lancashire in the United Kingdom who led the process of writing the code.

Around 50 authors contributed to the code, including researchers from around the world as well as representatives from the vulnerable communities it aims to protect.

One such community suffered a tragic loss only days before the code's launch, casting a shadow over the event. A prominent San leader, Mario Mahongo, died shortly before travelling to Stockholm, Sweden, for the launch.

"This is a major loss," says Schroeder, who describes Mahongo as the Nelson Mandela of his people. She says the code is dedicated to the memory of Mahongo and of Andries Steenkamp, another prominent San leader and co-author of the code who died in 2016.

Comments

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