

The importance of adhering to high standards of research ethics

Dear Editor,

We were interested to read Doody and Noonan's (2016) article concerning nursing research ethics. There has been a substantial increase in the amount of midwifery and nursing research undertaken in recent years. Increasing numbers of midwives and nurses acknowledge the need to bolster their own practice by using evidence-based research and conducting their own, if only to address questions and doubts related to day-to-day patient care.

Although much of midwifery school curricula in Poland is founded on evidence-based research, many practices taught to students are not based on any such proof. Modern midwifery/nursing strives to develop procedures based not only on traditional daily routines, but on rigorous scientific evidence.

Use of the most reliable science-derived data is becoming a global standard in medical decision-making. Part of this trend has been the inclusion of the review of up-to-date scientific literature as the standard of due diligence for every health professional.

Research-related activity is a chief driver of progress in the field of medicine. However, there is a danger that research may become the subject of monetary contracts, and an opportunity for financial gain. In addition, the struggle to achieve the best possible results in the shortest possible time may lead to the lowering of standards of reliability and conscientiousness in research.

This troubling phenomenon, first observed in the natural sciences, has spread to other fields (Panel on Ethics in Science, 2000; Commission on Ethics in Science, 2012). It is for this reason that all new research needs to be planned and conducted according to the rules of scientific research ethics. Concerns about the quality of research led to the development of the ethics of scientific research as a separate field. Discussion of the problem has entered the intellectual mainstream as more examples of flawed research are exposed by the media.

Systems of evaluation that emphasise the importance of productivity (the quantity of research) have created an incentive to produce more research at the expense of quality (Panel on Ethics in Science, 2000).

The scientific community has seen a need for the creation and implementation of standards of good practice for scientific research. Such standards should be supported, disseminated and followed by all scientists and all researchers, whatever their field. Every aspiring researcher should be aware of the consequences of breaking such rules.

Despite many problems ensuing from the lack of respect for proper standards for conducting research, most frequently apparent in the form of plagiarism or result falsification, dedicated ethical training for young researchers is still too rare. Consequently, the burden of promoting and disseminating proper standards and procedures falls on the heads of research groups and institutes and, at a lower level, on doctoral supervisors.

The response to the problem of the lowering of research standards in Poland, led to the creation of the Ethics Commission for Supervision of Human Research at the Health Ministry, as well as the ethics boards at medical academies in 1982. In 1992, the Commission on Ethics in Science at the State Academy of Sciences and the Medical Ethics Commission were established. All of these institutions share a common mission—the implementation and sustenance of proper standards in scientific research.

In 1994, the Ethics Committee at the Academy of Sciences issued guidelines entitled *Good Habits in Science* (Commission on Ethics in Science, 1994). These guidelines, now updated, together with an ethical code for nursing/midwifery research, allow one to draw basic norms of conduct in research (Commission on Ethics in Science, 2001).

The mounting challenge of falling standards caused the Commission on Ethics in Science to publish its *Code of Ethics in Science*, containing universal rules and values to be adhered to by every scientist and researcher

(Commission on Ethics in Science, 2012). This code set out the chief features of proper practice in research:

- Adherence to basic standards of scientific practice (adequacy and standardisation of methods, conscientious recording of results, scepticism towards one's own findings, and an honest admission of the contributions of one's collaborators, rivals and predecessors)
- Creation of an environment fostering cooperation between different research teams
- Attention to the needs of young researchers and the fostering of ethical attitudes
- Proper data handling and storage
- Adherence to copyright and publication rules
- Avoiding conflicts of interest.

All of these norms should be universally accepted and understood. When scientific dishonesty takes place, actions should be taken to sanction the researcher breaking the commonly affirmed rules and procedures.

Ethical values, standards of scientific diligence and good practices in research are the responsibility of the scientific community as a whole and of each practitioner alone—a fact that we should all remember. **BJN**

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