

Irish Council for Bioethics
Comhairle Bitheitice na hÉireann

Minutes for Council Meeting
Thursday 10th June 2004

- In the Chair:** Mr. Dermot Gleeson
- Also present:** Professor P. Cunningham; Mr. Matt Dempsey; Dr M. Fitzgerald; Dr P. Flanagan; Professor Cecily Kelleher; Dr N. O'Brien; Professor R. O'Regan; Professor S. Strain; Professor P. Whittaker;
- Apologies for absence:** Dr D. Dooley; Professor P. Hannon; Mr. K. Kearon; Professor M. Lawler; Professor Tony McGleenan; Dr P. McKenna; Ms M. Mulvihill; Professor F. O'Gara; Professor A. Scott; Mr A. Sheikh.
- Also in attendance:** Dr S. O'Sullivan, Ms. E. de Grae

1. Minutes

The minutes from the previous meeting were adopted.

2. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

3. Report from the Scientific Director

Dr. Siobhán O'Sullivan gave an account of the one-day meeting for all national research ethics committees. She informed all present that the meeting served two functions; firstly as a networking meeting to facilitate co-operation and discussion of areas of common interests between committees; and secondly as an information session to help committees prepare for the new Government Clinical Trials initiative, which commenced on 1st May 2004. She advised members that the idea for the document being presented to Council for approval had arisen from this discussion.
(Proceedings of the event have been posted on the Bioethics website).

Dr O'Sullivan informed council members that *The Ethics of Eating* conference, hosted jointly by the National Committee for Nutritional Sciences and The Irish Council for Bioethics was held on Wednesday 24th March 2004. She advised the members that topics of discussion included obesity, politics and the developing world and the GM debate. She told members that the speakers involved were exceptional and that the meeting opened up an interesting and engaging discussion.
(Abstracts from the speakers have been posted on the Bioethics website).

Dr O'Sullivan gave an account of the Irish Council's for Bioethics' recent meeting with the European Group on Ethics (EGE) which took place on 18th May. The topics under discussion on the day included Biobanking and the collection of stem cells from umbilical cord blood. She said that it was a productive meeting and that both the EGE delegates and members of the Irish Council for Bioethics had learned a great deal from the discussion.

Dr. O'Sullivan advised members that the Third Forum of the National Ethics Councils would be held on 11th June. She informed members that they were not expected to attend the meeting as it was traditionally only attended by the Chair and Scientific Director of each committee.

Dr. O'Sullivan informed Council members that an Extranet had been set up for their convenience and that they would soon be able to download documents from the system. She told members that the system was extremely easy to use and that she would forward usage instructions to all members in early course.

4. Report from the Chairperson of the GM Working Group

Professor Peter Whittaker reported to members on the progress of the group. He advised members that there were draft chapters currently being prepared, which would need to be amended. He informed those present that the recent developments in farm-scale trials in the UK and the withdrawal of major Biotech companies from the European market would need to be discussed. Professor Whittaker agreed to prepare a paper on the report's progress for the next Council meeting.

5. Report from the Chairperson of the Biological Collections Working Group

Dr. Paddy Flanagan and Professor Ronan O'Regan addressed Council on behalf of Professor Mark Lawler. The rapporteurs told members that the group met on 19th April to amend a previously drawn up list of recommendations and to discuss the issue of Biobanking. A new set of recommendations had been forwarded to Professor Lawler who, due to illness, was not yet in a position to approve them. Dr. O'Sullivan stated that the working group would hope to have a draft of the document ready for Council review by the autumn.

6. Report from the Chairperson of the Ethics Committees Working Group

Professor Cecily Kelleher gave an account of the Research Ethics Committee and some of the issues arising from that meeting (see Proceedings of the National Research Ethics Committees 23rd March 2004). She described the procedure used in writing the document, stating that the working group had met on numerous occasions to discuss the issues at length.

However, the point was raised that while the primary task of an ethics committee is to protect the rights of participants/volunteers it should also be noted in the document that supporting research was another important role of an ethics committee.

With reference to multi-centre trials, it was agreed that a provision should be added to the recommendations for research undertaken in non-EU countries. Dr. O'Sullivan agreed to amend the document as requested.

The document was endorsed by all present. Mr. Gleeson noted that a Quorum of 11 members had not been achieved. Therefore, he requested that the secretariat contact those members who were unable to attend the meeting and ask them to either assent or dissent to the document in writing at their earliest possible convenience.

7. Any other Business

In order to aid the progress of the working groups Mr. Gleeson proposed that a vice-chair be appointed to each one. Professor Cecily Kelleher, Chair of the Ethics Committee working group, appointed Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald as vice-chair. Professor Peter Whittaker, chair of the GMO working group appointed Professor Seán Strain as vice-chair. Professor Ronan O'regan and Dr. Paddy Flanagan suggested Mr. Asim Sheikh as a vice-chair. The appointment of the three vice-chairs was endorsed by all present.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council will take place at **10.30am on Thursday, 9th September 2004.**
