

**Irish Council for Bioethics**  
*Comhairle Bitheitice na hÉireann*

**Minutes for Council Meeting**  
**Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2004**

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

**1. Minutes**

It was agreed that the minutes of the previous Council meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2003, would be adopted following corrections to the titles of some council members.

**2. Matters Arising**

As the chairs of each of the working groups were unable to attend today's Council meeting, it was decided that a member from each group would deliver a report on the progress of the individual working groups.

**3. Report from the Scientific Director**

Dr. Siobhán O'Sullivan gave an account of the Council's first annual public lecture given by Professor Sir John Sulston in the Helix Theatre on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2004. She stated that while overall the lecture was a success, she would hope to increase attendance for next year's event. Dr. O'Sullivan also gave an account of the *Genetics and Disability* Conference held in NUI Galway from 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> March, hosted by the Centre of Bioethical Research and Analysis. She informed the Council that the conference was extremely successful and had attracted an impressive line up of speakers as well as a positive media response. Dr O'Sullivan told council members that it was an important topic and that it was excellent that the Council could sponsor such an event and be involved in such a meaningful discussion.

Dr O'Sullivan advised members that the Council would be hosting a one-day meeting for all national research ethics committees. She informed all present that it would be an information session to help committees prepare for the new Government Clinical trials

initiative due to commence on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004. 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 would be held on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2004. She advised the members that topics of discussion would include obesity, politics and the developing world and the GM debate.

With reference to Ireland's EU Presidency, Dr O'Sullivan stated that the Irish Council for Bioethics would host two meetings during that time. The first meeting, a gathering of the European Group on Ethics (EGE) would take place on 18<sup>th</sup> May. She informed members that while the morning session would be a private EGE meeting, it was customary for the EGE to meet with the national Ethics Committee to exchange views in the afternoon session. The topics under discussion on the day would include Biobanking and the collection of stem cells from umbilical cord blood. Dr O'Sullivan urged as many members as possible to attend this afternoon session and invited all council members to a welcome dinner arranged for the EGE on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2004. The second meeting arranged will be held on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2004. This meeting will be the third forum of National Ethics Committees in Europe and the purpose of the forum is to exchange experiences and forge relations between committees. Dr O'Sullivan advised 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.

#### **4. Report from the Chairperson of the GM Working Group**

Dr Paddy Flanagan reported to members on the public consultation process. The group discussed Dr. Flanagan's report on the public consultation and extended their thanks to him for his work in this matter. Dr. Flanagan gave a summary of the report, stating that its aim was to present an objective account of the public consultation process. It was decided that it would be helpful if all members of the Council could be forwarded a summarised version of Dr Flanagan's report. Dr. Flanagan agreed to send a copy of this version to Dr. O'Sullivan who would then circulate it to the council. It was agreed that the final report of the working group should be shorter than first envisaged and should be entirely Irish-centric.

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

Mr. Asim Sheikh addressed the council on behalf of Professor Mark Lawler. He informed the Council that due to illness Professor Lawler was unable to chair a meeting of the Biological Collections working group since the last Council Meeting. He informed members that the group had prepared a draft set of recommendations, which would be finalised in early course. Mr. Sheikh also told the members that at the next meeting the group would discuss the issue of Biobanking and would draw up recommendations on that topic thereafter.

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

Dr. Margaret Fitzgerald reported to the members on the progress of the Ethics Committee working group since the last meeting of Council. The working group decided that a one-day consultative meeting should be arranged for Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> March.

Dr. Fitzgerald informed Council that the event would consist, firstly of an overview of the national situation regarding ethics committees and an overview of international best

practice. Secondly, Dr Stephanie Harcourt would discuss the implications of the Clinical Trial Directive for ethics committees in Northern Ireland and Dr. Tom McGuinn, of the Department of Health & Children with responsibility for transposing the EU directive on Clinical Trials in the Republic of Ireland, would address the meeting and outline proposals which will directly effect the operation of Research Ethics Committees in the Republic of Ireland from May 1st 2004.

Council stressed the importance of expanding the discussion at the meeting beyond clinical trials as a large proportion of protocols being considered by RECs deal with non-clinical trial studies.

#### **7. Any other Business**

The sequence of report publication was discussed. It was agreed that the Ethics Committee report, would be the first. All present agreed that the GMO report would follow in relatively quick succession and would focus on the Irish situation regarding GMOs. Regarding the Biological Collections document this would be the final report of the sequence.

Dr O'Sullivan suggested the setting up of an Extranet on which the secretariat would post relevant material and could be accessed by all Council members. This was agreed upon.

#### **8. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Council will take place at **10.30am on Thursday, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2004.** It was agreed that Mr. Gleeson would arrange a meeting with the three chairs of the working groups. Possible dates for this meeting would be decided in early course.

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