

Irish Council for Bioethics
Comhairle Bitheitice na hÉireann

Minutes for Council Meeting
Thursday 9th September 2004

- In the Chair:** Mr. Dermot Gleeson
- Present:** Prof. P. Cunningham; Mr. M. Dempsey; Prof. M. Lawler; Dr. P. McKenna; Ms. M. Mulvihill; Prof. F. O’Gara; Prof. R. O’Regan.; Prof. A Scott.
- Apologies for absence:** Prof. P. Whittaker; Dr. D. Dooley; Dr. M. Fitzgerald; Dr P. Flanagan; Prof. P. Hannon; Mr. K. Kearon; Prof. C. Kelleher; Prof. T. McGleenan, Dr. N. O’Brien; Mr. A. Sheikh; Prof. Sean Strain.
- Also present:** Dr. Siobhan O’Sullivan; Ms Emily de Grae

1. Minutes

The minutes were adopted and signed.

2. Matters Arising

The quorum had not been achieved for the meeting. This was compounded by the fact that the rules of procedure should be amended so that any member who failed to attend three consecutive council meetings would be asked to resign their position. As a quorum was not present no decision could be taken on this issue.

Mr Asim Sheikh informed Council members that Prof. Mark Lawler had resigned from the Human Biological Material working group, due to Prof. Lawlers involvement with the Dublin Molecular Medicine Centre (DMMC) which has recently initiated a biobank for prostate cancer samples. Prof. Lawler thought it would be in the best interest of the group to step down and therefore avoid any perceived conflict of interest that might arise in the future. Mr Sheikh, as vice-chair of the group took over the role of the chair with the support of all present. Mr. Dermot Gleeson thanked Prof. Lawler for his valuable contribution to the working group.

3. Report from the scientific director

Dr. O’Sullivan reported to the council that the National Ethics Council meeting held on the 11th June under the auspices of the Irish National Council for Bioethics was a great success. Representatives from the twenty-five National Ethics Councils from across Europe were present at the meeting. The aim of the meeting was to share best practice and experience amongst all member states. The afternoon was dedicated to discussing

new and emerging bioethical issues. The topic selected for the Dublin meeting was Animal Human Chimeras. Background information on the topic has been posted on the extranet for Council members. A presentation by Prof. Dinnyes, from Hungary, outlined how far science has already progressed in this area. This was followed by a discussion on the ethical implications of this research. Dr. O'Sullivan informed council members that much of the meeting of the National Ethics Councils had been dedicated to discussing the future of the NEC forum. There appeared to be some confusion with respect to future financial support from the European Commission to hold such networking meetings. It was agreed that the Irish Council for Bioethics in conjunction with the Health Council of the Netherlands would prepare a letter to the Presidents of the European Commission, which would seek to clarify if financial assistance would be forthcoming from the Commission for the next NEC meeting planned for December 2004, in Amsterdam. Dr. O'Sullivan informed Council members that such a letter had been prepared and had been sent to the President of the European Commission in recent days.

Dr. O'Sullivan informed members that the launch of the Council's first document, entitled "Operational Procedures For Research Ethics Committees: Guidance 2004" would be launched by the Minister for Health, Mr. Michéal Martin on the 14th September 2004. She also reported that the document had been very well received by research ethics committees around the country. Dr. O'Sullivan informed members of the Council that an extranet had been established on the Irish Council for Bioethics website, which would be dedicated to members of Research Ethics Committees. It was hoped that the extranet would serve as a discussion forum and point of contact for Research Ethics Committee members and would allow them to access information of relevance to them. Dr. O'Sullivan also informed members that a meeting had been held in the Royal Irish Academy on the 8th September 2004, of Research Ethics Committee members who had been recognised or were in the process of seeking recognition from the Department of Health for reviewing clinical trial protocols. The aim of the meeting was to provide a forum for the committees to reach a consensus on how operational aspects of clinical trial review would be executed.

With respect to the second annual Bioethics Lecture to be held in February 2005, Dr. O'Sullivan informed members that Prof. Francis Fukuyama had been invited to deliver the lecture. It was envisaged that the lecture would address some of the issues raised by Prof. Fukuyama in his recent book, "Our Post-Human Future". Dr. O'Sullivan asked for suggestions from the members for alternative speakers, should Prof. Fukuyama decline the invitation. Members suggested that Susan Greenfield, Richard Dawkins, Alexander McCall-Smith, Matt Ridley and John Harris could be considered to deliver the Bioethics Public Lecture. Dr. O'Sullivan thanked members for their suggestions and said she would keep members informed of progress on this issue.

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

Mr. Asim Sheikh informed the council that the Biological Material Working Group had a useful and comprehensive meeting on Friday 9th July 2004. Mr. Sheikh explained that the Working Group had had a wide ranging discussion on the commercialisation of human biological material, and that much progress had been made on finalising the set of recommendations for the report on human biological materials. When asked for a timeline for the report Mr Sheikh replied that the Working Group felt it realistic that a report would be produced by January 2005.

5. Any other business

Some members of councils enquired as to the status of the report on Genetically Modified Organisms. It was noted that there had not been a meeting of the GMO Working Group for some time and that significant developments had occurred during that time frame. Dr. O'Sullivan explained to the group that the secretariat were fully employed in preparing the report on Human Biological Material. It was hoped that once the Human Biological Material report was published in January that the full attention of the secretariat could be focused on preparing the report on Genetically Modified Organisms. The point was made that this report should be relevant and that therefore the report should focus on the issues of containment, consumer choice and the availability of non-GM seed. The Chairman asked Dr. O'Sullivan to communicate these points to the Chairperson of the Working Group on Genetically Modified Organisms, Prof. Peter Whittaker.

6. Date of next meeting

Thursday 9th December 2004 at 10.00am.
