Improving the governance and administration of Institutional Review Board (IRB) to promote clinical research in a teaching hospital

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Introduction
As a teaching hospital, one of the key roles of Queen Mary Hospital is to promote clinical research to underpin teaching and clinical service delivery. IRB was set up to provide ethical review of clinical research applications. In coping with a rising number of applications, IRB has to maintain the quality of ethical review with compliance to international and local guidelines.

Objectives
- To enhance the governance structure of IRB. - To enhance the quality of ethical review of research. - To enhance document control of submissions and storage of documents - To enhance the progress report submission rate of approved studies.

Methodology
(I) A high level Governance Committee (GC) has been jointly formed by The University of Hong Kong (HKU) and HA Hong Kong West Cluster (HKW) in March 2014; (II) To improve administration: a) Since January 2012, all submitted documents have been filed in electronic format. b) Since October 2012, Principal Investigators of interventional studies are mandatorily required to present their studies to the Review Panel; c) Since February 2013, IRB would only process Principal Investigators’ new submissions if they have no outstanding progress reports of approved projects; d) To enhance the quality of ethical review: (i) Between April 2013 and June 2014, additional members have been appointed; (ii) In May 2014, a Phase 1 Panel has been established; (iii) Since June 2014, studies involving vulnerable subjects have to be reviewed by a Panel.
Result
The governance of IRB has been enhanced with the GC responsible for policy making, administration and resource matters. In coping with the ever-rising volume of workload, IRB has maintained service quality, and achieved better workload distribution among IRB members with significantly improved results in the 2nd-half of 2014 as evidenced by the following key outcome indicators:
- Workload by all IRB Review Panels: Increased from 4,881 in 2012 to 6,488 in 2014, an increase of 33%.
- Workload by the Expedited Review Panel: Increased from 476 in 2012 to 600 in 2014, an increase of 26%. But individual panel member workload: Decreased from 325 to 277 from first-half to second-half in 2014, a decrease of 14.8%.
- The progress report submission rates of 2012 and 2013 had increased to 91% from under 50% in 2010 and 2011.