

## Overall Assessment of Human Research and Ethics Committees in the United Arab Emirates

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**Abstract :** Growing demand for human health research in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has prompted the need to develop a robust research ethics oversight, particularly given the large unskilled-worker immigrant population and the elderly citizens utilizing health services. Examination of the structure, function, practices and outcomes of the human research ethics committees (HREC) was conducted using two survey instruments, reliable and validated. Results indicate that in the absence of a national ethics regulatory body, the individual emirate's governed 21 HRECs covering health facilities and academic institutions in the UAE. Among the HRECs, 86% followed International Council for Harmonization-Good Clinical Practice guidelines, 57% have been in operation for more than five years, 81% reviewed proposals within eight weeks, 48% reviewed for clinical and scientific merit apart from ethics, and 43% handled more than 50 research proposals per year. However, researcher recognition, funding transparency, adverse event reporting systems were widespread in less than one-third of all HRECs. Surprisingly, intellectual property right was not included as a research output. Research was incorporated into the vision and mission statements of many (62%) organizations and, mechanisms such as research publications, collaborations, and recognitions were employed as key performance indicators to measure research output. In spite, resources to generate research output such as dedicated budget (19%), support staff (19%) and continuous training and mentoring program for medical residents and HREC members were somehow lacking. HREC structure and operations in the UAE are similar to other regions of the world, resources allocation for efficient, quality monitoring, continuous training, and the creation of a clinical research network are needed to strengthen the clinical research enterprise to scale up for the future. It is anticipated that the results of this study will benefit investigators, regulators, pharmaceutical sponsors and the policy makers in the region.

**Keywords :** institutional review board, ethics committee, human research ethics, United Arab Emirates (UAE)

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