

## **Research Regulation; clouds on the horizon. *Understanding Research Governance***

**Stephanie Poustie**

*ANZCA Trials Group Coordinator. Research Fellow, Monash University. Vic*

Research governance has been defined as “a framework through which institutions are accountable for the scientific quality, ethical acceptability and safety of the research that they sponsor or permit”.<sup>1</sup>

Frameworks for research governance exist in the United Kingdom, Canada and the USA with the latter moving towards a more legislative approach. Australia has its own framework: the revised joint Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2007<sup>2</sup>, and the allocation of a chapter to research governance in the revised NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007.<sup>3</sup>

While both the National Statement and the Australian Code emphasise that research governance is the primary responsibility of institutions (and researchers) rather than resting solely with Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs), the principles of research governance remain poorly understood, with little evidence of institutional implementation in the literature.

Good research governance borrows its guiding principles from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)<sup>4</sup>. The principles include responsibility and accountability; participation; transparency; organisational capacity; technical and managerial competence in research conduct; compliance; and audit, review and evaluation.

It is the last of these principles that are often applied by HRECs, institutions or researchers in the belief that research governance responsibilities are being met. Yet to view research governance through a model of audit and compliance only creates an undesirable approach of being “risk adverse” and ignores the broader framework that research governance implies.

Institutions need to allocate appropriate resources to ensure that research governance frameworks are implemented to provide the structure, guidelines and education required to ensure integrity at every level of research conduct.

1. Improving the governance of health research. Walsh M, McNeil J, Breen K. MJA 2005;182:468-471
2. Joint NHMRC/ARC/Universities Australia. Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2007
3. NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007.
4. OECD. [www.oecd.org/dataoecd](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd)