



## **FORUM FOR ETHICAL REVIEW COMMITTEES IN ASIA AND THE WESTERN PACIFIC**

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### **FERCAP Statement During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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The outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) disease that has caused a global pandemic has caught many public health systems and scientific communities unprepared, leaving them unable to adopt immediate and effective measures to prevent the spread of the disease, treat the ensuing victims, and prevent the consequential socio-economic fallout. As public health authorities and scientists scramble to discover appropriate contingency interventions, research ethics communities (RECs) are facing urgent challenges to balance conflicting interests and concerns to arrest and contain the spread of the coronavirus. As such, bioethicists and RECs are reiterating their commitment to upholding the ethical principles of respect for human dignity, beneficence, and justice to protect vulnerable populations and research participants who were recruited to join in human trials about novel drugs and vaccines as well as experimental public health interventions.

The **Forum for Ethical Review Committees in Asia and the Western Pacific** (FERCAP) supports current international and national initiatives to find timely solutions to prevent COVID-19 from further wreaking havoc to delicate and unprepared health systems to prevent untimely deaths and serious illnesses among various local populations. As a community of RECs, FERCAP renews its resolve to adhere and strengthen the protection of human participants in research by upholding the following ethical initiatives:

- Supporting innovative and ethical use of existing and novel interventions emanating from various disciplines
- Ensuring that research protocols do not aggravate existing situations of injustice
- Emphasizing the need for efficient systems to improve turn-around time to enable timely research implementation
- Prioritizing respect for human dignity of participants in all REC decisions
- Providing mechanisms to get input and feedback from vulnerable populations involved in the various studies
- Capacitating and strengthening RECs to deal with ethical issues related to novel research methods and challenging research environments

In order to facilitate timely review of urgent COVID-19 protocols during this time of global emergency, RECs are urged to adopt relevant guidelines and standard operating procedures (SOPs) that incorporate the following features:

- Sharing relevant research ethics and regulatory guidelines among country and FERCAP member RECs
- Maximizing virtual platforms to convene full board meetings to review and approve COVID-19 and other similar emergency-type protocols
- Streamlining the review process of multicenter protocols to be conducted in multiple sites within one state or region through single or joint review mechanisms

- Harmonizing ethics review and decisions among various sites through joint review or consultation mechanisms
- Developing expertise on outbreak research to facilitate conduct of rapid review
- Developing informed consent templates for outbreak researches
- Defining appropriate and recommended timelines for efficient ethics review
- Training REC staff for efficient and timely documentation of review as well as timely communication of decisions and recommendations
- Conducting capacity-building training on ethics review of research protocols during epidemic outbreaks, disasters, and similar emergency situations
- Conducting research and publishing articles about ethics review principles and procedures to share good practices with other RECs

The goal of this statement during this critical period of global emergency is to define the roles and responsibilities of FERCAP member RECs towards a coordinated response to save lives from a disease that originated and continues to spread in the Asia-Pacific region.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kenji Hira", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**KENJI HIRAYAMA, M.D., PH.D.**  
FERCAP Chair