



Dear <<First Name>>,

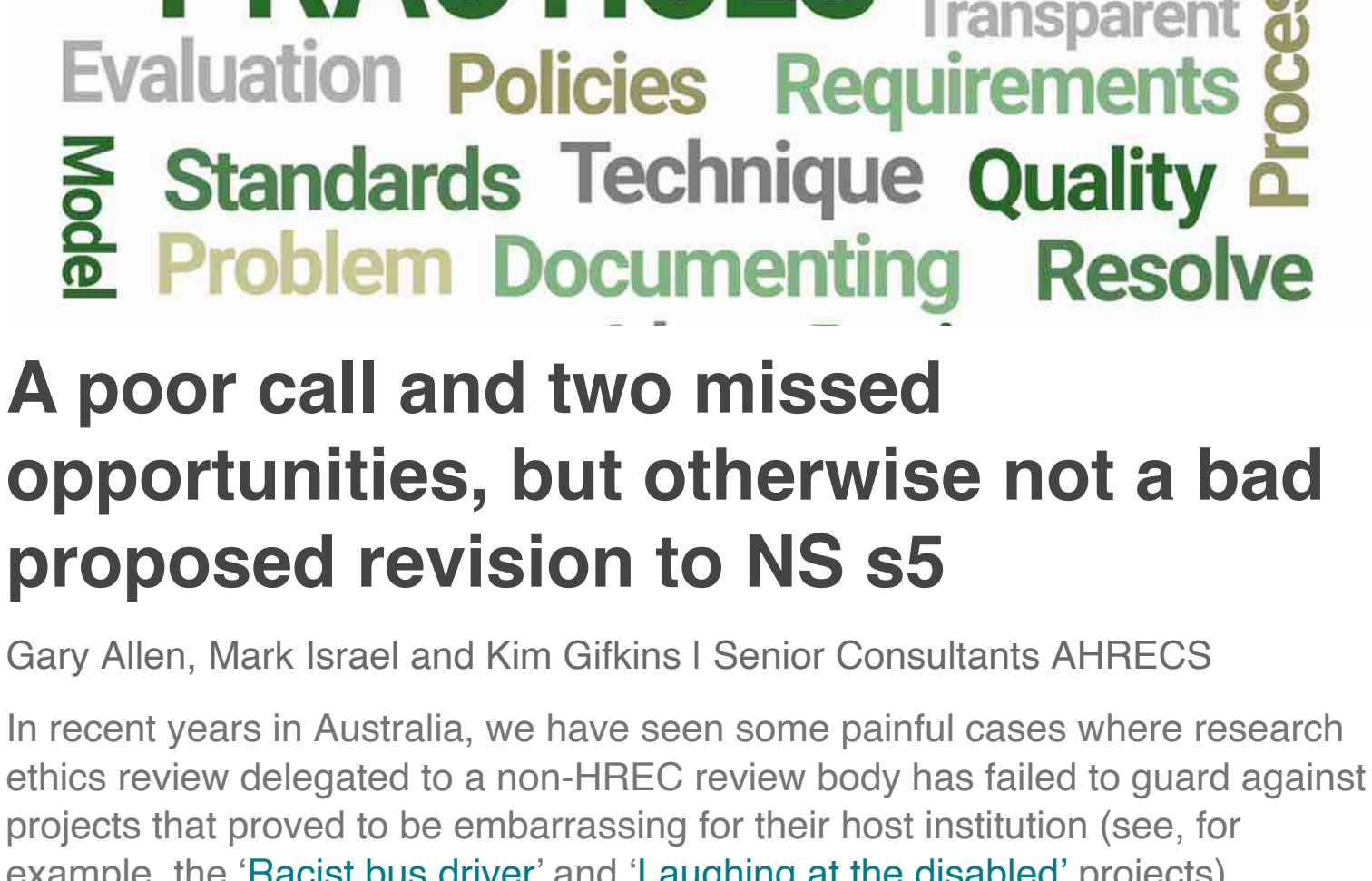
Welcome to the October/November 2020 edition of the Research Ethics Monthly.

AHRECS is currently undertaking our biggest job ever, and we are continuing our work with institutions in Australia, New Zealand and the UK. As if that weren't enough, we are also in discussions with a couple of exciting new clients. Some of the AHRECS consultants will be taking a well-earned break over the holiday season, but never fear, we'll respond to queries as soon as we can.

If you aren't named above, please [subscribe](#) to the *Research Ethics Monthly*, because it is incredibly affirming, free and would be greatly appreciated. Subscribing is free, easy and keeps our in-house internet elf happy.

More information about the Research Ethics Monthly can be found on the [blog pages](#).

Our sincere best wishes for a safe and glorious holiday season.



### A poor call and two missed opportunities, but otherwise not a bad proposed revision to NS s5

Gary Allen, Mark Israel and Kim Giffins | Senior Consultants AHRECS

In recent years in Australia, we have seen some painful cases where research ethics review delegated to a non-HREC review body has failed to guard against projects that proved to be embarrassing for their host institution (see, for example, the ['Bacist bus driver'](#) and ['Laughing at the disabled'](#) projects).

For some institutions, it might be time to centralise governance, and democratise knowledge and ownership. It might also be time to change distributed practices that might have been in place for decades.

Delegated non-HREC review done well can be just as nuanced, probing and rigorous as HREC review. It can bring in external perspectives and manage institutional risks effectively. Such reviews can be far more rigorous than the processes that those who resist delegation might fear – e.g. cursory nods to senior colleagues and bewildering 'captain's calls'. There is perhaps an argument in the biosciences that we need to evaluate and closely monitor how well a risk has been mitigated. On the other hand, in many of the social sciences, there are risks that can be largely removed. For example, consider a research project investigating the relationship between team leaders and staff. If the comments of a team member became known to their supervisor, this could expose them to serious risk (e.g. employment, social, legal or financial risk). This risk could be minimised by masking the identity of speakers. Another useful strategy would be to conceal who was approached about participating and then who agreed to participate. A thoughtful research design that recognises the potential risk and employs strategies such as those mentioned above would reduce the risk to a minimal level. We argue that it is this residual level of risk that should be used to determine the process for review. Of course, this argument is much stronger when an institution has good guidance material with regard to reflective approaches to risks...

[Read more](#)

### Our work around the world

#### AHRECS is now a small but a multi-national company

Close to the bottom of our revamped [home page](#) is a world map that tags the places we have been commissioned to conduct Human Research Ethics or Research Integrity work or where we have conducted philanthropic/academic/volunteer/unpaid work. Want to explore if we can do some work for you? Tiptoe! Drop us a line to [enquiry@ahreecs.com](mailto:enquiry@ahreecs.com) so we can discuss your ideas.

### VC's award for reconciliation

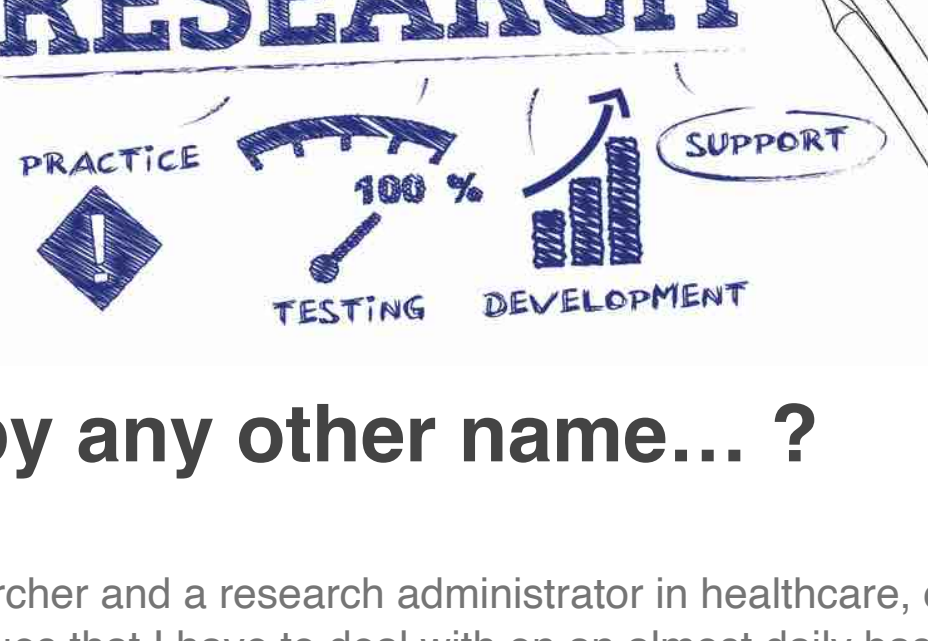
We are delighted to share the new that AHRECS consultant Mandy Downing has just received a VC Award for general staff for her work at Curtin University.

**Introduction**  
Through candid storytelling and soundly researched arguments, Mandy Downing captures the attention of diverse audiences and invites them to join her in conversation about, and to engage in, reconciliation.

**Impact**  
Mandy engenders trust with audiences to engage in reconciliatory dialogue, for example as part of the John Curtin Gallery Speaker Series; invited guest lectures to undergraduate health sciences and humanities students, as an invited speaker to 1200 guests as part of Reconciliation Week 2020, expert ethical review on the AATSIIS Human Research Ethics Committee, and her extensive voluntary contribution as a Kwopertek Yoga Alumni. I have witnessed audience members moved to tears by Mandy's presentations; with one so thankful for a forum to reflect on her own white fragility. Such feedback demonstrates Mandy's ability to inspire people to seriously consider what reconciliation means to them.

**Attributes**  
Mandy is leading public discourse on reconciliation, while supporting and guiding staff, students and future leaders. Mandy's impact inspires us to engage in what she terms reconciliAction."

**Well done Mandy, you deserve the recognition!**



### A rose by any other name... ?

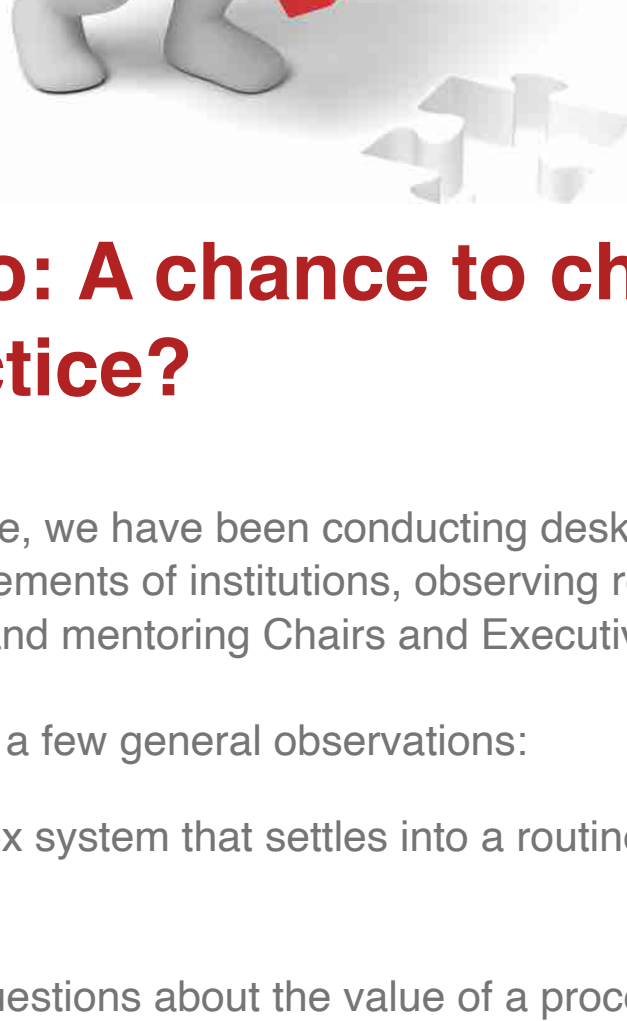
Nik Zepos

As both a researcher and a research administrator in healthcare, one of the more vexing issues that I have to deal with on an almost daily basis is how to manage what are termed quality assurance, quality improvement and audit activities. In its 2014 publication entitled ["Ethical Considerations in Quality Assurance and Evaluation Activities"](#), the NHMRC (NHMRC QA guidance) suggests that these can be loosely gathered together under an umbrella term of Quality Assurance (QA) and/or evaluation. I believe this construct is wrong and reinforces a longstanding approach to ethics review that relies on the category of an investigative activity to determine the level of review that is used. This approach is problematic and leads to some significant unintended consequences.

Most institutions appear to have made their own interpretations of the content and intention of the NHMRC QA guidance and still spend time defining whether an activity is research or QA/QI so as to be able to push it down one review pathway or another. Added to this is the frequently repeated canard that, if one wishes to publish a QA activity, then one requires ethics approval. The most common justification for this assertion is that journal editors demand it, creating circumstances in which low or negligible risk activities end up being screened by HREC offices and/or reviewed by HRECs despite the fact that the National Statement clearly indicates that this is not necessary (Section 5.1.17-5.1.21).

How did we get here? Having served on the Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC) from 2006-2012, during which I was involved in developing what was eventually published as the NHMRC QA guidance, I have something of an insider perspective. Whilst, with my colleagues, I was able to successfully advocate for the line *"Irrespective of whether an activity is QA, evaluation or research, the activity must be conducted in a way that is ethical."*, I believe that we fundamentally failed to persuade our colleagues, or the country at large, that there is a better, more proportionate, way to fulfil our responsibilities for oversight of these activities; specifically, a model that is more effective than simply categorising them as research, evaluation, QA or QI.

[Read more](#)



### Going video: A chance to change review practice?

Dr Gary Allen

For more than a decade, we have been conducting desktop audits of human research ethics arrangements of institutions, observing review body meetings, coaching committees and mentoring Chairs and Executive Officers.

We would like to share a few general observations:

- Any large complex system that settles into a routine can be resistant to change.
- Responding to questions about the value of a process or the usefulness of an alternative with something along the lines of "but we've always done things this way", should be the start of, not the end of probing conversation. Yes, you have been doing things a certain way for a while, but is it the best way?
- A committee that feels under-resourced and is just coping with high workloads can suspend professional development for members and researchers, because it may be perceived as a luxury. This suspension can become the new normal, particularly given the tightening financial constraints being felt by the sector.

At a time where you might be fighting to keep your head above water during staff cuts, budget austerity and increased workload, it may sound odd to ask: Can anything constructive come out of COVID-19 and social distancing...

[Read more](#)

### If you build it, they will come - 2020 Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Training Conference (online) 18-20 Nov

Approximately 2.5 months from inception to execution, a veritable cornucopia of Australia's thought leaders on topics such as consent, voluntary assisted dying (VAD), AI in healthcare, ethical aspects of research involving Indigenous people combined to make a three day phenomenon and one which all attendees will remember. This memory will not simply be for the quality of the talks (it's hard to say Wow! too many times in relation to Brent Richards' talk on AI or Maree Toombs' talk with 3 case studies illustrating how to do research with Indigenous people). The memory may also be because the format of the conference, which was online, free to attend, and with spaced out sessions to facilitate completion of work-related tasks, was novel and hopefully beneficial.

As part of the formal opening of the conference, there was a celebration and acknowledgement of the contribution made to human research ethics in Australasia by Colin Thomson AM. Even though he had made the difficult decision to retire, after many decades of service, his sage, patient and generous wisdom had shaped the careers/development of many (including most of the speakers at the conference) and the evolution of the National Statement. His selfless contribution will continue to be treasured for many more decades.

In at least one way, this meeting was phenomenal. Enabled by an absence of relevant ethical conferences this year, with the cancellation of the Australasian Ethics Network (AEN) conference and the Australasian Association of Bioethics and Health Law (AABHL), the meeting filled a gap in the training of HREC members and their access to contemporary information about topics that they consider in every application. Indeed, one of the themes that may have emerged was the need to consider not just the guidelines used to make decisions, but instead to put this in the context of the overall perceived good of the research study – a teleological rather than deontological approach, if you will. More simply put, find reasons to approve rather than to find fault. This in itself is a worthy goal, and one that should perhaps form the perspective of HRECs.

The meeting was phenomenal in a second way. It was organised largely by two people and run by those same two people on the Zoom platform. Although there were a few minor hiccups including a dodgy Spotify playlist in the breaks, this event showed that the need to pay exorbitant fees to hotels or venues to host conferences (including the time of sound/AV technicians) should be firmly in the past. This year has taught all in academia how to use platforms such as Teams or Zoom, so the extension of these platforms to host a conference, which attracted 800 registrants from Australia and a few from the US and New Zealand, should not have come as any surprise. However, what was surprising was the ease with which it could be hosted and coordinated, even when the scheduling of concurrent sessions was required.

[Read more](#)

### While you are here...

Did you enjoy this edition? **Would you like to support the work we do?** If so, please consider helping us cover the cost of matters such as hosting the Research Ethics Monthly and other web development by becoming an AHRECS Patron.

In addition to the warm glow from supporting our work, you will be subscribed for monthly updates of useful material (such as resources for use in your local workshops).

**INSTITUTION**  
Subscriptions for institutions cost \$350/year. A tax invoice will be provided. Payments can be made by credit card over the phone, EFT or via PayPal. To become a patron email [patron@ahreecs.org](mailto:patron@ahreecs.org).

**INDIVIDUAL**  
Subscriptions start at USD1/month and USD15/month gives you access to all materials. See <https://www.patreon.com/ahreecs>.

A few profiled items from the subscribers' area:

- It's a slippery slope to research misconduct – A Research Integrity resource
- [An Australian history of human research ethics 1](#) A ppt produced by Colin Thomson AM - A Human Research Ethics resource
- Is my application ready for research ethics review? - A Human Research Ethics resource
- [Duped](#) - A research integrity commentary
- Setting up a monitoring arrangement for human research - A human research ethics talk by Kim Giffins
- [A summary consent sheet](#) - A Human Research discussion activity 0
- eConsent - A Human Research Ethics talk by Nik Zepos
- [Lost data](#) - A Research Integrity discussion activity
- Disaster recovery plan – A Research Integrity discussion activity
- [Diversity in consent strategies](#) - A Human Research Ethics discussion activity

Please join us in saying a big thank you to our new Gold Patrons:

- ANROWS
- Ballarat Health Services
- Barwon Health
- Bendigo Health
- CentCare
- Central Queensland University
- James Cook University
- The Internal Review Panel of the Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business (Commonwealth)
- RAND Australia
- Torrens University
- University of Canterbury (NZ)
- University of Melbourne
- The University of Sydney Ethics Office

**By their generosity, they keep Research Ethics Monthly free and ad-free**

### Things You May Have Missed...


#### Our Resource Library

- [Indigenous Data Sovereignty in the era of Big Data and Open Data](#) - Papers
- [How reliable and useful is Cabell's Blacklist? A data-driven analysis](#) - Paper
- [Efficient Scientific Self-Correction in Times of Crisis](#) - Book chapter
- [Continued post-retraction citation of a fraudulent clinical trial report: 11 years after it was retracted for falsifying data](#) - Paper
- [Research Integrity: Understanding our shared responsibility for a sustainable scholarly ecosystem](#) - Resource
- [Problematising "Responsible Publishing": A systematic review of factors shaping publishing motives, decisions, and experiences](#) - Paper
- [The damage of substandard research during the COVID-19 pandemic: a call for quality](#) - Paper
- [Threats of Bots and Other Bad Actors to Data Quality Following Research Participant Recruitment Through Social Media: Cross-Sectional Questionnaire](#) - Paper
- [\(China / EU\) Defining and Handling Research Misconduct: A Comparison Between Chinese and European Institutional Policies](#) - Paper
- [\(South Africa\) The Unintended Consequences of Using Direct Incentives to Drive the Complex Task of Research Dissemination](#) - Paper

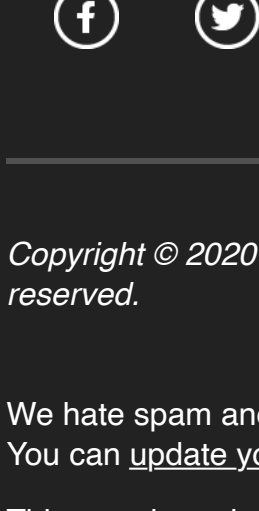
There were more than 62 more great items in the last 50 days. Follow us on social media to get an alert when new items are added ([LinkedIn](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#))

#### Our Blog

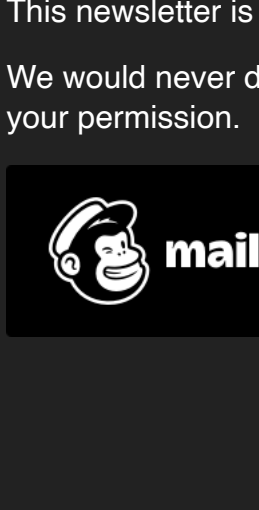
- Hong Kong Principles
- Is it time to extend the required membership of research ethics committees?
- Reframing Indigenous consultation: engagement and risk management
- Updated checklist for HDR Supervisors
- Questionable publishing practices? Are you harmed?
- What are questionable research practices as reported by ECRs in STEM in Australia?
- Embedding clinical research as part of routine healthcare: Managing the potential for competing interests.
- Worried your researchers might not be treating human research ethics as a core component of good research practice? Concerned they are not seeing it as their responsibility?
- The ethical petri-dish: recommendations for the design of university
- When Research is the treatment: why the research/clinical care divide doesn't always work



Do you know someone who hasn't subscribed yet to the Research Ethics Monthly? Please encourage them to subscribe now and help us grow this community.



Got an idea for a post or a suggestion for a guest? Send an email to [gary@ahreecs.com](mailto:gary@ahreecs.com)



Do you have a view, feedback or some constructive criticism on this or other posts? Every item has comment link so you can have your say and continue the conversation.

