

NIEHS receives human research accreditation, launches training programs

By Robin Arnette

The NIEHS Office of Human Research Compliance (OHRC) Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) has the important job of protecting human participants in clinical research studies. Following its March accreditation from the governing body that oversees such programs, OHRC has implemented a seminar series, workshops, and working groups to provide continuous training and education for NIEHS staff about human research protection issues in clinical research.

Joan Pakenham, Ph.D., OHRC director and vice chair of the NIEHS Clinical Research Program Institutional Review Board (IRB), said that every three years the National Institutes of Health HRPP must apply for reaccreditation from the Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs Inc. (AAHRPP). (<http://www.aahrpp.org/>)

Pakenham explained why it is so important to receive and maintain accreditation. "Accreditation from AAHRPP means that the institute follows rigorous standards for ethics, quality, and protections for human research," she said. "We want volunteers who participate in NIEHS-sponsored research studies to know that we are working hard to protect them."

Seminar series and workshops

In one of several efforts to fulfill continuing requirements, OHRC initiated a seminar series, "Practical Applications and Regulatory Considerations in Human Research." The inaugural lecture was presented July 28 by Stephanie Studenski, M.D., who spoke on "The Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging: America's longest running scientific study on human aging" (see text box).

The seminar series continued Aug. 15 with "Certificates of Confidentiality: Protecting Human Subject Research Data in Law and Practice," presented by Leslie Wolf, J.D., Professor of Law at Georgia State University College of Law. Wolf explained that Certificates of Confidentiality are an important tool in protecting the privacy of research study participants and clarified the specific situations in which they are employed. To find out more, please see the NIH Certificates of Confidentiality [kiosk](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/coc/index.htm). (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/coc/index.htm>)

The next lecture in the series Oct. 15 will feature Michele Evans, M.D., National Institute on Aging (NIA) deputy scientific director and chief of the Laboratory of Epidemiology and Population Sciences Health Disparities Research Section. Evans will discuss "Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity Across the Life Span Protocol," a method for involving community-engaged research in the inner city of Baltimore, Maryland.

OHRC will also sponsor an IRB training workshop Sept. 4 at Sigma Xi in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. The workshop, "IRB Review of Public Health Emergency Research: An Introduction," is open to IRB members, clinical researchers, and clinical staff. Advanced [registration](#) is required.



Pakenham and her staff will schedule additional OHRC training programs throughout the accreditation period. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

Research reveals keys to aging well

While growing older is a part of life, some may not look forward to the fragility and cognitive decline that often accompanies aging. However, the research performed by geriatrician and rheumatologist Studenski suggests it's possible to lead active and productive lives regardless of age.

Studenski is chief of the NIA Longitudinal Studies Section, and director of the Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging ([BLSA](http://www.blsa.nih.gov/)) (<http://www.blsa.nih.gov/>), America's longest running scientific study on human aging.

She and NIA Scientific Director Luigi Ferrucci, M.D., Ph.D., believe that cognition and mobility are the major things people need to age well. In fact, some of her current work examines an emerging thought in the field - the brain has a processing speed that determines how fast it can do things. The phenomenon may impact conditions such as dementia and Parkinson's disease.

"You can look at indicators of this processing speed in young adults and examine how they evolve over time," Studenski said. "I think processing speed impacts a lot of things, not just cognition, but movement and mood."

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