

## Book review

**Research ethics from a developing world perspective.** Athula Sumathipala and Sisira Siribaddana. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications. 2003. pp 63 cm 14x22.5 11 chapters, an introduction and an appendix.

Drs Sumathipala and Siribaddana wrote the book because they could not find any document on research ethics in Sri Lanka. (The Natural Resources, Energy and Science Authority, NARESA, had prepared a set of codes of ethics for the sciences in 1992, but it was not published and has got forgotten). The authors' first draft had been made with particular reference to their own research project on a Sri Lankan Twin Registry, but discussions with medical colleagues had led them to widen the scope of the book to the general field of "biomedical" research. It deals with research on human subjects. There is no reference to the use of animals in research.

The treatment of the subject is not in an essay form but systematic in point form – each of the 11 chapters has three sections: policy, guidelines, and references. Overall, the book is useful, challenging, and rich with its references.

Research ethics topics for promotion of good research dealt with by the authors include those concerned with the competence of the researchers and the care taken to

design the research. There is thorough consideration of the concept of informed consent from individuals or groups of individuals who are subjected to research. The authors also place emphasis on the importance of obtaining approval from an ethics committee. If there is no attention paid in this book to the causes of unethical research, such as cruelty, wish to please a donor or an examiner, hurry, prejudice, and so on, it may be because the authors felt them to be too trivial to consider.

It is not clear how the ethics of research in poor countries like Sri Lanka would differ from that in western countries. While the authors pay due attention to the question of rewards to researchers from financial grants for the research, they leave out such matters as the possibility of corruption and dependence on donor wishes. Nor is there consideration of the question whether it would be more ethical for a poor country to concentrate its research upon people's basic needs, and whether each senior researcher should as a matter of principle work on pure as well as applied subjects.

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