Fraser Health Research Ethics Board
Department of Evaluation and Research Services , FHA
400 – 13450 102 Avenue, Surrey, BC V3T 0H1
Phone: (604) 587-4436 Fax: (604) 930-5425

GUIDANCE NOTES ON RESEARCH RECRUITMENT

INTRODUCTION

As stated in the Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2), "the approach to recruitment is an important element in assuring voluntariness" of research participants. This guidance note is intended to provide general guidance on the submission requirements and process for initial ethical review for research involving humans at Fraser Health.

GUIDANCE NOTE #1: REQUIRED INFORMATION

All methods of recruitment for potential participants for prospective must be detailed in the application form, including:

- How will potential participants be identified
- How will information will be obtained for potential participants
- Who will initiate contact with the potential participants
- How and when will potential participants be initially contacted
- What is the relationship, if any, of the study team members to potential participants (e.g., treating clinician, instructor, etc.)
- What recruitment materials (e.g., advertisements, posters, letters, etc.) will be used

For retrospective research using secondary records, the specific details of how the records will be identified and selected for the study should be included in the protocol/proposal.

All research recruitment methods, procedures, and documents must be approved by the REB prior to implementation.

GUIDANCE NOTE #2: ENSURING RECRUITMENT IS FREE FROM UNDUE INFLUENCE

In order to uphold the principle of voluntariness, it is important for research recruitment to be free from undue influence or coercion. Undue influence may arise when there are power imbalances between the researcher and the prospective participant, such as when prospective participants are recruited by individuals in a position of authority, power, trust, or dependency over them (TCPS 2), e.g., a treating physician recruiting patients under their care, instructors recruiting students in their classroom, etc.

Coercion refers to “a more extreme form of undue influence, involving a threat of harm or punishment for failure to participate” (TCPS 2).

It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure the principle of voluntariness is upheld.

2.1 Patient/Client Recruitment by Health Care Providers

Initial contact with a patient/client to introduce the research study should be done by a person within their circle of care. However, the REB recommends this not be the treating physician/direct care provider, where possible. If the requirements of the study design make it necessary for a treating physician/direct care provider to introduce the study, the researcher must describe the measures that will be taken to mitigate against any undue influence.

The REB considers study nurses/research coordinators at specialized medical clinics to be within the circle of care for patients/clients within those clinics.

GUIDANCE NOTE #3: OBTAINING CONTACT INFORMATION FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS FROM SECONDARY RECORDS

The BC Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FoIPPA) makes public bodies more accountable to the public and protect personal privacy. This applies to public sector institutions, including Fraser Health. Section 35 of the Act limits the use of information collected by public bodies for research purpose.

The Office of Information & Privacy Commissioner for BC has provided the following clarifications regarding the use of personal information to contact patients for research recruitment purposes in the Guidance Document: Access to Data for Health Research (January 2018):

1. Employees of Fraser Health may contact potential participants from the Fraser Health patient pool if the research is conducted under a program or activity of the healthy authority; however, the contact is limited to obtaining the patient’s consent to participate in the research.

2. External researchers are not permitted to request the health authority pre-screen patients to determine eligibility to participate in a study based on pre-assigned criteria and request the contact information of these eligible participants be disclosed to the researcher.

3. External researchers may request Fraser Health staff or its agent to pre-screen patients to determine eligibility for a study based on pre-defined criteria. If patients are eligible for a study, then Fraser Health staff or its agent may contact the eligible patients and provide them with information (i) about the study and (ii) the researcher’s contact information. Fraser Health staff or its agent may do this only if one or both of the following conditions apply:

a. the research falls under a Fraser Health program or activity and the patients were notified at the time of collection; or

b. the patients have consented to participate in the research study.

3.1 Fraser Health Consent to Contact Database

The Fraser Health Department of Evaluation and Research Services maintains a Consent to Contact database of patients/clients of Fraser Health who have provided consent to be contacted for current or future research opportunities in Fraser Health. As a means to improve participant recruitment in research, the Consent to Contact database may be accessed by researchers who are employees and/or privileged physicians of Fraser Health. The use of the Fraser Health Consent to Contact database must be detailed in the study protocol/proposal.

3.2 Information Held by Disease Specific Registries

Participants who have previously consented to be included in a research registry, which included consent for contact for future research, must be initially contacted by mail using the contact information held in the registry. The letter must explain to the participants the purpose of the study and how their contact information was obtained. This letter must be submitted to the REB for approval.

3.3 The Fraser Health Global Outlook Email List

Identifying and contacting prospective participants for research recruitment using the Fraser Health Global Outlook email list is not permitted. Fraser Health employees with managerial responsibilities may use email to notify their department or unit that a research study may be conducted in their department/unit. The email text/script used for this purpose should be submitted to the REB for review. Care should be taken to ensure the voluntary nature of participation, such as including a statement that the decision whether to participate will be no consequences to employment. Potential participants should be instructed to contact the researchers directly should they have interest in participating.

GUIDANCE NOTE #4: THIRD PARTY RECRUITMENT AND SNOWBALL SAMPLING

Recruitment strategies in which contact information for potential participants is obtained by third parties (such as other study participants) and given directly to the researchers, poses a number of ethical challenges. It is generally preferable for third parties to distribute a study information/invitation letter to other potential participants so that these potential participants may contact the researchers directly if interested.

GUIDANCE NOTE #5: RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

All recruitment materials must be submitted for REB approval prior to use. Recruitment materials should provide potential participants with the study title, a description of the study purpose, what is expected of participants (including the time commitment), and the general eligibility criteria for the research. The Fraser Health logo should be included on all recruitment documents.

Remuneration/payment information should not be included on the recruitment materials.

All recruitment materials must include a version number and date.