SUSS Research Forum

Executive Summary

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Submitting an SUSS-IRB Application

The SUSS Research Forum on 'Submitting an SUSS-IRB Application', held on 24 September 2026, provided an overview of the SUSS-IRB's role and the application review process. The session was presented by Mr Michael Ng and moderated by A/P Adrian Kwek.

Michael opened the presentation by describing the role of SUSS-IRB in reviewing research involving human participants to safeguard their rights, interests, and safety. This underpins its core functions of conducting ethics reviews, formulating policies and processes, conducting outreach and education, and facilitating audits.

Addressing the question of when IRB approval is required, Michael highlighted two key points. Firstly, an IRB application is mandatory for research, involving human participants or identifiable information, conducted by SUSS faculty members, regardless of publication plans.

Secondly, even if an activity is not classified as research, an IRB application may be submitted if there is intent to publish and the publisher requires ethics approval. As retrospective approval cannot be granted, Michael emphasized the importance of applying in advance where future publication is a possibility.

For waiver of an IRB submission to SUSS-IRB, Principal Investigators (PIs) should approach SUSS-IRB for advice before commencement of research.

Michael stressed the importance of determining whether a study falls under the Human Biomedical Research Act (HBRA), as incorrect classification may have legal implications. He explained how PIs can assess their HBR status based on their research purpose and methodology. The IRB reviews the assessment, while the HBR Chair makes the final decision.

Speaker

Mr Michael Ng
(Social, Behavioural and Educational Research (SBER) Chair of SUSS's Institutional Review Board)

Moderator

A/P Adrian Kwek
(Associate Professor, College of Interdisciplinary & Experiential Learning)

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Sim Hui Wen, Vera

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Moving on to the ethical principles underpinning IRB's reviews, Michael shared that 'Non-maleficence' concerns potential risks and mitigation measures, 'Respect for autonomy' relates to informed consent and participants' capacity to consent, while 'Beneficence' and 'Justice' focus on participant benefit and fair treatment. He emphasised that PIs must provide sufficient information for the IRB to evaluate the study effectively.

Michael then outlined the review categories that applications may fall under. Studies granted 'Exemption from (further) review' do not require continuing review or a final report but must still report protocol amendments to the IRB. Most studies undergo 'Expedited review' as minimal risk research. Higher-risk studies are reviewed through 'Special expedited review (SBER) or Full-board review (HBR)'.

Furthermore, Michael highlighted that the IRB Secretariat will no longer provide detailed checks for applications. As a result, PIs can expect more detailed feedback and clarifications from reviewers.

The importance of allowing sufficient time for IRB review into project timelines was highlighted. Common causes of delays include incomplete submissions, insufficient responses to reviewer comments, and inconsistencies across application documents, especially when protocol amendments are not reflected throughout the submission package.

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