

Peer Review

Review of: "Does Accreditation Improve the Protection of Human Research Subjects and the Quality of Institutional Review Board Reviews?"

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I support all of the author's points up until the conclusion and recommendation. There also appears to be a suggestion, never explicitly stated, that independent IRBs may be more problematic than academic IRBs. The list of claims by AAHRPP, on page 4, is particularly problematic, as the author points out. While a competitive edge may be important for independent IRBs, it should be a result, not a goal, of accreditation. Further, as the author points out, the absence of reference to the protection of research subjects and their rights, or to sustaining public trust in research and its institutions, is egregious, given the purpose of the IRB system and the IOM recommendations that led to accreditation. However, this list of values is a result of the nature of "ethical review" of research - the system is structured to be responsive to the needs of the entities conducting research, not the participants it was intended to protect. AAHRPP relies for its sustainability (not profit) on support from these entities, and must articulate a value proposition that speaks to what they seek. That the list does not mention participant protections reflects the values of the research enterprise. The solution is not necessarily to reconsider the values of accreditation, but to change our focus so the ethical review system serves the needs of research subjects and the values of society, not the short-term priorities of research institutions and industry sponsors.

Note that my Institutional Affiliation is incorrect. I am the President of Freeport Research Systems, a research consulting LLC; Executive Director of North Star Review Board, a nonprofit (not commercial) independent IRB; and (most directly relevant to this review) Chair of the Board of Directors of the Association for the Accreditation of Human Research Protection Programs.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.