



World Health
Organization



MONASH University

Bioethics Fellowship 2017

Introduction

I am a senior advisor for the Ministry of Health in New Zealand, working in health research ethics and assisted reproductive technologies.

My 10 week fellowship started at the end of April and finished at the end of June.

I worked with the WHO Global Health Ethics Unit. They provide a focal point for the examination of ethical issues raised by activities throughout the Organization.

The unit also supports Member States in addressing ethical issues that arise in their own countries. This includes a range of global bioethics topics; from public health surveillance to developments in genomics, and from research with human beings to fair access to health services.

The team here is small, kind, works very hard, produces fantastic results and demonstrates global leadership. You can access an overview of ethical issues in global health at <http://www.who.int/ethics/topics/en/>

The interns at WHO are very helpful and organized. There are lunchtime seminars you can attend each week on a wide range of topics with experts from all over the globe.

Projects

During my time at WHO I worked on several projects simultaneously. Much of the work was independent, with frequent catch ups with my supervisors.

I worked with the WHO International Clinical Trials Registry Platform team, their goal is to ensure that a complete view of research is accessible to all those involved in health care decision making. The work will improve research transparency and will ultimately strengthen the validity and value of the scientific evidence base. This involved developing a method to identify intervention studies from clinical trials databases.

I developed proposed changes to the Research Ethics Committee Rules of Procedure, taking into account the recent review of the Common Rule as well as local issues raised by the Secretariat.

I conducted peer review on a range of international guidelines and reports, for example the inaugural WHO Guidelines on Ethical Issues in Public Health Surveillance and the report on the WHO meeting "Developing an Ethical Framework in Relation to Ageing and Health".



I helped develop the agenda and explore topics for the 12th Global Summit, to be held in Senegal in 2018. The summit is a biennial forum for national bioethics representatives to share information and experiences on ethical issues in health and public health. It is a platform for discussion and formulates consensus on a wide range of prominent ethical topics.

I also wrote speech notes for a talk on ethics in health information sharing.

Meetings and Conferences

The seventieth World Health Assembly, the decision making body for the WHO, was held during my fellowship. I was lucky enough to see the last speech of the outgoing Director General, Margaret Chan. Being at such a significant event in person allows the spectacle of global health (and politics) to be fully experienced.

I attended two ethics committee meetings of the Research Ethics Committee, where research applications were reviewed, and one meeting for the public health ethics committee on draft guidelines in development by the WHO.

Out on the edge of lake Geneva I attended a Brocher Foundation conference on Cybersecurity Challenges in Healthcare - Ethical, Legal and Social Aspects. The knowledge and expertise in the room was truly remarkable, as was the picturesque setting.

I attended the launch of Ethical Issues in Public Health Surveillance on my final day at the WHO. The guidelines were in development for over two years and were the efforts of many dedicated people, including a range of prior interns. To see the product of such hard work be recognized was very satisfying.

Conclusion

The WHO fellowship can be a significant investment due to the costs associated with living in Geneva, but it is one that is well worth it. I have met some amazing and kind people who have shared their experiences with me, making my knowledge of global ethics much richer.

In terms of the trip as a whole, my Fiancé and I visited 9 countries in total. The fellowship provided a fantastic opportunity to broaden our cultural horizon.

During my time at the WHO I reflected on differences between ethics systems in New Zealand and at the WHO. This added more value to my time here, as it enabled our countries and respective ethics teams to learn from one another.

I hope to continue work with the staff here in Geneva and will undoubtedly find some reason to return in future. The team here is kind, friendly and hard working. To be able to assist with their work was an honor and a privilege.

