HiREB or MREB?: Instructions for Determining which REB Should Review Your Research Project

In general, if the Principal Investigator (PI) is appointed by any Faculty other than the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS), then the study is reviewed by MREB. If the PI is from FHS, Hamilton Health Sciences or St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton, then the project should be reviewed by HiREB. For student research, if the Faculty Supervisor (FS) and Student Investigator (SI) are both in a Faculty other than FHS, then the study is reviewed by MREB. If both are from FHS, then the study is reviewed by HiREB.

Below are exceptions to this general rule.

If the PI (or FS and SI) is not appointed by FHS, but the study involves one or more of the following, then the ethics review should go through HiREB. If you are unsure, please contact MREB or HiREB at the contact information below.

* The focus of the study is on FHS faculty, students or staff (e.g. a pedagogical study on a course within FHS), as opposed to a campus wide recruitment that may include FHS faculty, students or staff.
* Recruitment of patients or staff through HHS and/or SJHH, or the use of patient records from HHS and/or SJHH.
* Invasive (or medical) procedures such as administering drugs, blood draws, muscle biopsies, intramuscular EMG, X-ray, MRI, TMS, and tDCS. Procedures that only involve sensors on the skin can generally be reviewed by MREB (e.g. EEG, ECG, surface EMG, GSR, etc.).
* Genetic analysis of biological material collected from participants (or obtained from a biobank).
* Obtaining the Personal Health Information (PHI) of individuals (using the PHI definition from the PHIPA Ontario legislation). There may be exceptions, such as obtaining specific test results from a physician with the participant's consent, check with the ethics office.
* Procedures that include a medical intervention, including therapy interventions intended to provide treatment for mental health conditions.
* Research involving the development of a device that is intended to be a medical device.
* The use of human tissue in research (e.g. organs, bones, blood, cell lines, etc.). There is a separate application administered by HiREB for the use of human tissue.

Additionally, there are some grey areas where you may need to consult MREB or HiREB first to confirm which REB should review before you start one of the application forms.

* If the PI is appointed by both FHS and one of the other Faculties, and the study procedures would not automatically send it to HiREB, then the study should go to the REB with the expertise most suitable to providing the ethics review. Please contact MREB or HiREB is you are unsure where to apply.
* For student research where the SI is conducting the research as part of an FHS course or thesis, but the supervisor is appointed by another Faculty, the ethics review will be done by HiREB.
* For student research where the SI is conducting the research as part of a course or thesis in a Faculty other than FHS, but the supervisor is appointed by FHS, please contact MREB or HiREB to determine where to apply.
* Research where the PI is from FHS, but the unique study procedures may be best reviewed by MREB members with expertise in the methods or population (e.g. a qualitative health study based on art therapy in an Indigenous community).
* Research where the PI is from outside FHS, but the unique study procedures may be best reviewed by HiREB members with medical expertise (e.g. a Kinesiology study that puts elderly participants through strenuous exercise conditions).

If you have any questions about determining the correct REB, please contact MREB or HiREB at the contact information below.

MREB Contact (Research Ethics Officer): ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca, 905-525-9140 x23142

HiREB Contact (Research Ethics Officer): sancan@hhsc.ca, 905-521-2100 x44574