



School of Population Health & Clinical Practice

**VISITING ACADEMIC SEMINAR
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR LYNN GILLAM**

Tuesday, 20th October 2009

TITLE: OPENING UP THE BLACK BOX: HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS IN PRACTICE

Ensuring that research involving human participants research in an ethical manner is widely accepted as being of the highest importance. As part of this endeavour, researchers and members of human research ethics committees (HRECs) spend untold millions of hours each year filling in ethics applications, and reading, evaluating and discussing them. However, there is surprising little research that has systematically investigated what actually goes in this process. In this seminar, I will present findings from Human Research Ethics in Practice, a three year project (2006-2008) examining how human research ethics committee members and health researchers make decisions about ethical issues in health research. My colleagues and I conducted 88 individual, in-depth interviews, with 34 HREC members across all categories of membership, and 54 health researchers in fields including biomedicine, epidemiology, clinical and social health research. We examined how health researchers and HREC members understand and think about research ethics and how, in practice, they address ethical issues in research. Here, I will discuss the ways in which HREC members approach their task of ethical evaluation, and compare this with the ethical thinking of health researchers. This is illuminating in terms of both understanding what ethics committees are looking for in an application, and how the process of ethics review might be improved. Perhaps surprisingly, the differences between the two groups are not major, and do not seem to be enough to account for the lingering negative feelings, and sense of mutual misunderstanding that came through during the interviews.

Venue: Robson Lecture Theatre, Level 1, Eleanor Harrauld Building, RAH

3.30pm-4.00pm

Afternoon tea

4.00pm-5.00pm

Associate Professor Lynn Gillam, School of Population Health, University of Melbourne and Children's Bioethics Centre, Royal Children's Hospital and Murdoch Childrens Research

Please RSVP to Gabriele for catering purposes by Tuesday 13th October close of business. (Email: gabriele.matzke@adelaide.edu.au)



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR LYNN GILLAM

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Lynn Gillam is a bioethicist with particular interests in clinical ethics, especially in paediatrics, genetics, research ethics and ethics education. She holds positions at three related institutions in Melbourne: the University of Melbourne, the Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the Royal Children's Hospital. Lynn is Associate Professor in Health Ethics at the Centre for Health and Society, School of Population Health, at the University of Melbourne; and the Academic Director of the Children's Bioethics Centre, an initiative of the Royal Children's Hospital, in partnership with the Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the University of Melbourne. As part of this role, she is the Clinical Ethicist at the Royal Children's Hospital.

Lynn's academic background is in philosophy and theology (MA, Oxon.), and bioethics (PhD, Monash). She currently teaches ethics in the undergraduate medical curriculum and the post-graduate social health programs at the University of Melbourne. She supervises masters and PhD students working in a number of areas, but especially on topics related to research ethics, genetics and clinical ethics.

Lynn has 15 years experience on Human Research Ethics Committees. She is currently a member of the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Melbourne. She also serves on a number of ethics advisory bodies for state government agencies and professional organisations.

Lynn has published widely in bioethics, on a range of issues, including pre-natal diagnosis, research ethics and ethics committees, the use of human foetal tissue, reproductive technologies and genetic testing. She is co-author of a text on critical thinking, called **Facts and Values** (MacLennan and Petty, Sydney, 1995), and **Telling Moments**, a narrative approach to clinical ethics (IP Communications, Sydney 2006).

Her current research interests include pre-natal diagnosis and selective abortion; ethical decision-making and the role of trust in research ethic; end-of-life decision-making in paediatrics, and controversial medical treatments which alter children, in particular surgical treatment of intersex conditions. She also has a strong interest in the intersections between ethics and sociology, and the development of inter-disciplinary qualitative methods suitable for research in ethics.