

The Research Unit under the auspices of the Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization: procedures and achievements

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Background

The Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization (KIMS) was established in 1984 with a decree issued by HH the Amir of Kuwait. The Institute is engaged in a variety of activities, including the organization of internship training of pre-registration medical graduates, specialty training at various levels in different medical fields, and continuing medical education programs for health professionals practicing in Kuwait (KIMS, 2001).

KIMS became responsible for the Research Unit (RU) since March 14, 2000, according to the Minister of Health decree number 130 in the year 2000. This unit is an extension for the Medical Research Unit which was founded by the Ministerial decree number 147 in the year 1996. RU is not a grant funding agency, it is only concerned with guidance and monitoring of the evaluation and implementation of health research projects.

Since 1996, there was an agreement among research grants awarding agencies that the Ministry of Health, represented by the Research Unit, should first approve health research grant proposals whether submitted by investigators from inside or outside the Ministry. Hence, the Research Unit receives health research proposals, evaluates them, ascertains that submitted proposals are complete and compatible with the priorities of health research in Kuwait, and ensures the feasibility of conducting them in Kuwait, taking into account the norms and traditions of the community.

Objectives of Research Unit

The objectives of the Research Unit is to promote scientific and clinical concerns of health workers through approving research projects

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which lead to the advancement of medical research and application of recent clinical technologies. It also ascertains that submitted projects meet human ethics through reviewing them by the Medical Research Ethics Committee and ensures establishment of health research database, and publication of scientific and applied findings of health research projects.

RU committed itself to build the infrastructure for health research and standardize the procedures to conduct through issuing a series of publications for proper guidance of health researchers. It is planned to expand the functions of RU in the future to include additional two subunits: Training in research methods, and consultation in medical research.

Achievements of RU since it became under KIMS umbrella

1. THE MEDICAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
RU has established the Medical Research Ethics Committee for ethical review of biomedical research proposals involving human subjects. This committee consists of 6 members (3 academicians and 2 consultants from the Ministry of Health), and a lawyer. The committee is chaired by the head of the Research Unit, KIMS, and meets on ad hoc basis. The committee is essential for integrating the process of research with the aim of protecting the rights of involved subjects. Members of this committee undertake comprehensive ethical review, including the research protocol, consent form and the letter of information to participating subjects. They may also exempt some research proposals from the requirements of research on human subjects. The function of this committee is to ensure;

1. That patients will be clearly informed about the procedures which will be followed in the project;

2. That medicines, lab tests and other procedures to which they will be exposed to are safe;
3. That participation in the research is voluntary, and that investigators will not exercise any kind of pressure to force patients to participate, and that participants will have full right to withdraw from the research any time without being harmed or penalized;
4. That the "Consent Form" and the "Letter of Information for Participants" include adequate information about stages and procedures of the research, as well as the right of the patient to withdraw; and
5. That additional safeguards have been provided if potentially vulnerable subjects are to be studied (e.g elderly, children, pregnant women, persons with disabilities, mentally disabled and people with severe illnesses).

2. PUBLICATIONS OF RESEARCH UNIT

I – HEALTH RESEARCH PROCEDURES¹

This booklet provides investigators with all information about health research procedures which should be followed, supplemented by standard research proposal form, and consent form for ethical requirements. The booklet also presents a flow-chart for steps to be followed by researchers to apply and implement their research.

II – ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH²

This booklet provides investigators and research subjects with guidelines for ethics in research conducted on human subjects. It is supplemented by standard 'Informed Consent' and 'Letter of Information to Participants'.

RU has an obligation to provide leadership, not only in health research, but also in maintaining high ethical standards. It has a responsibility to ensure that researchers are committed to high quality research that promotes the rights and welfare of research subjects. Therefore, RU has organized a system for ethical review of research involving human subjects taking into account, in addition to the rights and welfare of the subjects in-

involved, the appropriateness of the methods used to secure informed consent about risks and potential benefits of the research. The elements of the informed consent include the requirement that consent be documented and signed by subjects or their representatives.

III – SPECIALTY CHOICES OF KUWAITI MEDICAL GRADUATES DURING THE LAST THREE DECADES (1968–1999)³

This publication presents postgraduate specialty training of Kuwaiti medical graduates during the period 1968 to 1999, and identifies their attained professional qualifications in order to reveal scarcity in some specialties. A survey was carried out involving review of the records maintained at the *Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization* (KIMS) and Ministry of Health for all the trainees who were enrolled in higher training programs for specialization under KIMS supervision.

The study provided basic information about career choices and specialization attainments of Kuwaiti medical graduates. Such information are important for planning undergraduate and graduate medical education in addition to formulating strategies for attracting medical manpower to the scarce and high priority disciplines so that imbalances encountered in subspecialties would be minimal. Accordingly, findings of the study will help in avoiding overproduction or inadequate supply of doctors in certain specialties, i.e. help in achieving a balanced medical workforce. Moreover, emerging results can be shared with the other GCC countries, since they have similar health care and medical education systems.

References

1. KIMS. *Health Research Procedures*. Kuwait: Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization, Ministry of Health, Kuwait; 2001.
2. KIMS. *Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research*. Kuwait: Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization, Ministry of Health, Kuwait; 2001.
3. KIMS. *Speciality Choices of Kuwaiti Medical Graduates During the Last Three Decades (1968–1999)*. Kuwait: Kuwait Institute for Medical Specialization, Ministry of Health, Kuwait; 2001.