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**Human Research Ethics Committee**



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Dear Heads of Departments, Department Research Committees, Researchers and Members of the Research Community

**COVID-19: UPDATED FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH STUDIES AND RESEARCH SITES INVOLVING HUMANS DURING LOCKDOWN 4 (should be read in conjunction with the previous HREC guidance for research involving humans during COVID-19 dated 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and 6<sup>th</sup> July 2020)**

We are anticipating greatly increased community spread in South Africa. Therefore, all research activities where people are brought together for research purposes, and importantly, where research participants and research staff and students are placed at risk by virtue of the nature of data collection, or where specimen collection poses transmission risk should be urgently reviewed to determine the risk for COVID-19 transmission. Our duty is to ensure the protection of our participants, UCT staff and students and research communities; as well as reducing the risk of transmission.

**In line with recommendations to practice social distancing, mask wearing and hand sanitisation; we want to minimise the risk of transmission at research sites and in the context of research studies involving human participants.**

Over the next week, we recommend each research study or study site develop a plan to de-escalate or suspend non-therapeutic research activities. Limiting infections and protecting research participants and research staff and students should be the priority.

Therefore, the HREC recommendations are as follows:

1. Limiting infections and protecting research participants and research staff and students should be the priority.
2. All face-to-face non-therapeutic research involving human participants should be stopped. Exceptional reasons for face-to-face non-therapeutic research to continue should be discussed with the HREC.
3. For therapeutic research and clinical research trials:
  - a. All face-to-face non-essential therapeutic research and clinical research trials should be placed on hold and research activities should be suspended where possible.
  - b. Whenever possible, telephonic/online visits or follow-up should occur.
  - c. Principal investigators and study sites should implement measures to ensure that there is no interruption of required medication or monitoring of adverse events.
  - d. Only critical study visits where benefits significantly outweigh the potential harm of COVID-19 infection should take place going forward. Study visits for critical medication or monitoring purposes should continue in consultation with the HREC.
  - e. New enrolments to non-essential therapeutic studies should be suspended. Potential exceptions to this recommendation can be discussed with HREC.

- f. COVID-19 related therapeutic research may continue, in accordance with HREC requirements for COVID-19 research and specific COVID-19 study approvals.
4. Recommendations regarding hand hygiene, mask-wearing, cough etiquette and social distancing should continue to be implemented at study sites.
5. Researchers and study sites should make sure that their 'in the time of COVID-19' template register for potential retrospective contact tracing is fully functional.

**All precautions to prevent transmission and reduce risk need to be urgently implemented.**

The HREC will continue to function administratively, as well to accept and review new protocol submissions.

Yours sincerely



**PROFESSOR M BLOCKMAN**

**CHAIRPERSON, FHS HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**