

Data indicate significant impact of NIH African bioethics training programs

October 31 2016, by Leah Ramsay

From HIV to Malaria to Ebola, health and medical research with human participants in Africa—and the ethical evaluation of that research—has long been conducted by non-African scholars, a circumstance that can present its own ethical challenges. For over a decade, the Fogarty International Center (FIC) at the US National Institutes of Health has funded programs to strengthen capacity among African professionals to provide high quality ethics review of research and conduct their own bioethics research and teaching, leading to significant gains across the continent, according to a study published in *BMJ Open*.

Nancy Kass, lead author of the study, says, "I have been fortunate to work with many scholars participating in Fogarty bioethics programs. The data we've collected indicate that former trainees from sub-Saharan Africa are leaving a tremendously positive mark on the African bioethics landscape, both in terms of service and important scholarship. Their work clearly is making a critical impact on the welfare of communities and on improving health research institutions."

Kass jointly leads the Johns Hopkins-Fogarty African Bioethics Training Program with Adnan Hyder, both professors at the Johns Hopkins Berman Institute of Bioethics and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. The Johns Hopkins-Fogarty program has trained African scholars since 2000, and now coordinates the African Bioethics Consortium, a network of US and African institutions working collaboratively to enhance institutional capacities in international research ethics through training, research and service.

The *BMJ Open* study looks back on the 10 bioethics training programs FIC funded between 2000 and 2011 that were available to African scholars, including the Johns Hopkins-Fogarty program. According to surveys returned by 171 former trainees, they were significantly more likely to be a bioethics course instructor, serve on an Institutional Review Board, serve as an investigator on a bioethics research grant, and to have published a bioethics-related research manuscript than before training.

Prior to Fogarty bioethics training, 22% of respondents reported spending at least half of their professional time on bioethics, a figure that had grown to 53% post-training.

The study proposes that "a crucial outcome of organised training programmes may be their ability to foster lasting networks of professional researchers and academics." Hyder, senior author of the study, points to specific data, noting that all but seven scholars who responded to the study were living and working in Africa, with the large majority (93%) living in the same country as when they participated in the training program.

"Along with the other findings on teaching, research and service, this shows that the Fogarty programs are building sustainable bioethics capacity in Africa, and that trainees are taking what they learn and implementing it at home," says Hyder.

More information: Nancy E Kass et al, Bioethics training programmes for Africa: evaluating professional and bioethics-related achievements of African trainees after a decade of Fogarty NIH investment, *BMJ Open* (2016). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2016-012758](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2016-012758)

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