Student Involvement in Quality Assurance
or
Quality Improvement Projects and 'Research'

Background and Context:

UBC faculty and students' work is governed by UBC policies on Scholarly Integrity and Policies on Research with Human Subjects Policies 85 & 89. As a recipient of funding from Tri-Council Agencies, UBC has committed that all research involving human subjects will undergo ethical review as outlined by the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS). The process of ethical review is intended to ensure that individuals' rights (eg. voluntary participation, informed consent regarding potential risks and benefits, etc.) are respected as research is conducted.

While quality assurance (QA)and/or quality improvement (QI) projects may employ research type methodologies (eg. surveys, analyses of administrative data, chart reviews, etc.) they are not typically considered research under the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) and therefore are not typically submitted for ethical review – although there are exceptions.

QA-QI projects are typically undertaken by persons with organizational authority for ensuring quality, upholding standards and/or for monitoring outcomes. Therefore, such work can be seen as mandated by, or core to practice within, organizations (eg. professional associations, educational institutions, health care agencies etc.). QA or QI work, by its nature, may necessitate the project leader gain access to information that, under other circumstances, would be viewed as 'privileged' and/or that identifies individuals. Depending upon the context in which the work is being undertaken, this could include gathering, or gaining access to, a range and variety of information regarding: staff, patients, students, customers etc. A QA/QI project may also access information or generate analyses that are specific to an organization, or setting. Moreover, as such projects typically fall under the jurisdiction of the purpose or mandate of the organization, participation is not typically voluntary and individual's consent to participate, or consent for access to information is not necessarily a requirement. Similarly, as such analyses are typically intended to shed light on achievement of standards or objectives of a particular organizational context, the analyses may be considered privileged information by the organization (eg. market information, achievement of safety standards, incidence of nosocomial infections, violence, quality of performance on particular work tasks, procedures etc.) or in some instances organizations may have a reporting requirement.

As nursing is a practice profession, it is conceivable that nurses will be both participants in, leaders of, or consultants for, QA/QI projects. There are times when engagement with such projects may offer useful learning experiences for students. This could take the form of a thesis, major paper or directed study.

There have been instances however, where the expectations regarding student involvement in such projects have not been clearly articulated. And, as major papers, or student projects may become publicly available (albeit in some instances to fairly limited audiences) and as Thesis are public documents there have been cases where organizations have expressed concerns about the potential

risks associated with an individual, group of individuals, organization or setting being identifiable, or, where people have expressed concerns about the potential for the violation of their rights etc.

Should the student involvement in the QA or QI project form the basis of his or her thesis work, it becomes research, and if the research involves people, or access to documents with information about people such that it satisfies UBCs requirements for ethical review, the project must be approved by the appropriate Research Ethics Board.

Policy on Student Involvement in QI/QA projects:

Student engagement in QI/QA projects as learning experiences within our academic programs be considered only when the following conditions are met:

- When the project is being undertaken to fulfill requirements for a thesis, it meets the UBC criteria for research with human subjects and therefore undergoes ethical review by the appropriate REB.

OR

- There is an identified faculty member who has a contractual role in a QA/QI project.

- The faculty member ensures that the student is aware of ethical and/or legal issues associated with the proposed project and seeks to ensure that the student upholds both contractual, legal and ethical standards when engaged with the project.

- The sponsoring organization agrees to the student's participation in the QA/QI project (as evidenced by the provision of a letter to the appropriate Program Director – (a copy of which will be included in the student's file). The letter should:

  - Indicate the title of the project - and the course for which the student is receiving credit *(eg. thesis, directed study etc.)* and name the faculty person involved
  - Name the person responsible for oversight of the project within the organization
  - Outline the nature of the student's involvement
  - recognize the faculty role in oversight on the project

  and

  - Specify any expectations related to, or limitations on, the dissemination of information or analyses undertaken as a part of the project.