

Dual relationships

In the context of research with humans, a dual relationship can exist *when the researcher has another (or several) significant relationship(s) with the research participant other than that which is the subject of the research protocol*. An example of a dual relationship is when, for example, the researcher is also responsible for project, program or administrative oversight within the organisation where it is proposed to implement an approved research protocol, when participants in such a research program are also under the administrative care of the researcher. Such secondary relationships can create inappropriate power relationships between researchers and participants, with consequent ethical difficulties, when for instance the research *participant may reasonably perceive*:

- a) actual or potential conflicts of interest for the researcher 'as researcher' and 'as administrator or manager in the secondary relationship' in addressing for example such issues as security of information and the handling of complaints;
- b) the likelihood of potential compromises concerning the confidentiality and anonymity being assured to research participants in the research protocol.

The securing of genuine voluntary informed consent from research participants may also be compromised when it may be perceived by potential participants at recruitment stage that it may be prejudicial to their interests should they decline participation in the research.

In submitting research protocols for consideration by the DHS HREC, researchers should:

1. Disclose in the protocol any actual or potential dual relationships with the research participants and notify the Committee should such a situation arise during the implementation of an approved research protocol.
2. Advise how the dual relationship can be managed so that the interests of the research participant are fully protected on the one hand, and the integrity of the research program is not compromised on the other.
3. Address any possible perceptions by research participants that confidentiality and anonymity may be compromised.
4. Establish appropriate processes within the protocol for complaints procedures that involve notification to other persons or authorities in addition to, or instead of, the researcher in the first instance.
5. Ensure that, as much as is practically possible, an appropriate power distance is maintained by the researcher (or actively and effectively monitored by a person independent of the researcher) during the implementation of any approved research protocol.
6. Ensure that procedures are followed that prevent information collected for the purposes of an approved research program are not used for any other purpose with which the researcher may be associated in the secondary or dual relationship.