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Honouring our Social Obligation: Incorporating social accountability & responsibility throughout the research process

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October 25th, 2021

Michael G. DeGroote SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

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Large Research Group Meeting

Honouring our Social Obligation: Incorporating social accountability & responsibility throughout the research process

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Agenda

1. Social Responsibility/Social Accountability – what does this mean?
2. Social Responsibility/Accountability in Research: How is this different from but related to research ethics
3. Breakout groups: Putting it into Practice
4. Large group debrief and summary
5. Break (10 mins)
6. Interactive activity (20 mins)

Menti Question #1:

What words come to mind when you hear the term social accountability?

Go to menti.com and enter code: 8279 7608

What is social responsibility?

At an individual level:

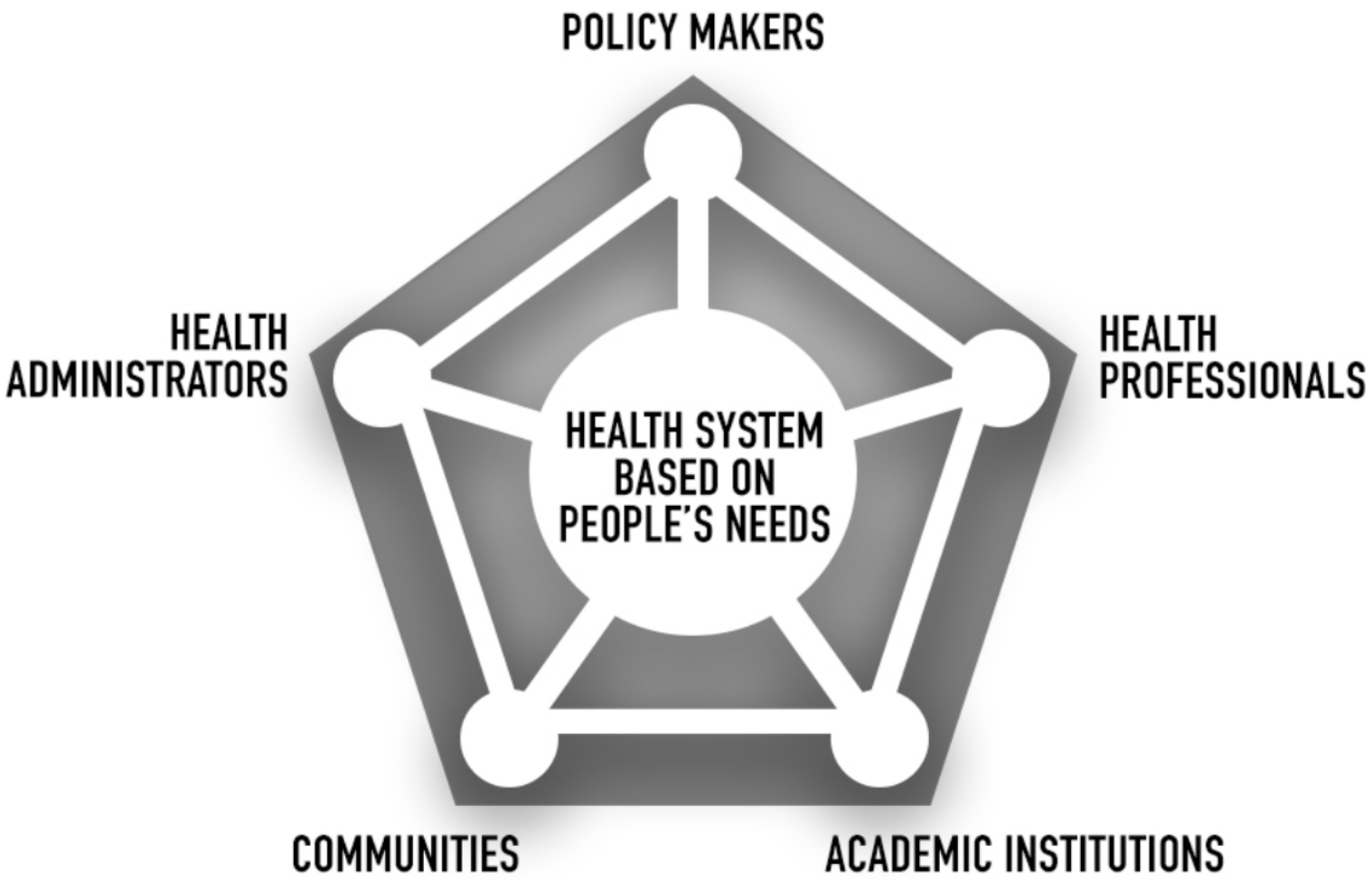
- the civic duty of every person to act in the best interest of society as a whole and the environment
- Requires having situational awareness and empathy
- Applies to actions in both their personal and professional lives
- Can be seen as being a ”good global citizen”

What is Social Responsibility?

In the context of an academic institution:

"the obligation [of medical schools] to direct their education, research and service activities towards addressing the priority health concerns of the community, region, and/or nation they have a mandate to serve. The priority health concerns are to be identified jointly by governments, health care organizations, health professionals and the public."

(World Health Organization 1995/TUFH Paper 2000)


POLICY MAKERS
HEALTH ADMINISTRATORS
HEALTH PROFESSIONALS
HEALTH SYSTEM BASED ON PEOPLE'S NEEDS
COMMUNITIES
ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

Degrees of Social Responsiveness

Neutrality

- carry out their education, research and service delivery functions with little concern for adapting them to the changing needs of individuals, families or the community at large
- has little direct and immediate relevance to people living in the surrounding community

Reactiveness

- aware of priority health needs in society and take the initiative in reacting responsibly
- mandate is explicit as to improving people's health, facilitating universal access to health services and contributing to meeting new challenges in the health system
- facilitate collaborative ventures with health authorities and the community with a view to improving the relevance of the education, research and outreach programmes.

Proactivity

- characterized by an attitude of anticipation
- collaborate with other partners to make an authoritative situation analysis of the health sector, to identify the future challenges in the health sector and to contribute to designing and developing innovative approaches to meet these challenges.

What is Social Accountability?

goes beyond the concept of social responsiveness, as it implies that the school consults society to jointly identify priority health issues and expectations. The school then seeks evidence that it addresses these issues and expectations with a view to obtaining short-term and longer-term benefits, in part for the local community and in part for the country as a whole or the international community.

Understanding the difference between responsibility and accountability

Responsibility → Responsiveness → Accountability

Social needs identified	Implicitly	Explicitly	Anticipatively
Institutional objectives	Defined by faculty	Inspired from data	Defined with society
Educational programs	Community-oriented	Community-based	Contextualized
Quality of graduates	« Good » practitioners	Meeting criteria of professionalism	Health system change agents
Focus of evaluation	Process	Outcome	Impact

Social accountability can be assessed by means of four essential reference points

Beyond Research Ethics…

- Ethics focus on safety, health and welfare of the public.

Menti Question #2:

In our current system, what does "safety" in research ethics mean?

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Ethical Issues

- **Microethical issues** – addressed within the everyday context of research through education/training, explicit policies developed by the department, university, and ethics boards.
- **Macroethical issues** – collective social responsibility of the profession. Related to the application of the research findings: use and potential misuse and abuse of research findings.

Social responsibility in research

- Extend beyond upholding the ethical standards
- Responsibility of scientists as global citizens and as experts in their fields
- Self-awareness of duties and biases
- Make research respectful, accessible and generalizable
- Examines the relationship of researchers as an individual to the common good, to the larger society in which research is funded, conducted, and applied

Social accountability in research

- Joint effort of citizens, community, public organizations, research institutions, funders and researchers
- Focuses on priority health needs and challenges of the ones we intend to serve
- Continuous adaptation and evaluation of research programs to meet these health needs.
- Attend to the foreseeable societal impacts of research work
- Determine whether the intervention being studied affects members of the society including minority groups and their subpopulations differently

Collective responsibilities of research institutes

- Have a deep understanding of their community responsibilities with a view towards population health and eliminating health inequities in **partnership with community members**
- Contribute substantially to public understanding of science by promoting an **informed community**
- Build a culturally sensitive and diverse team
- Acknowledge the limits of the science and when its application is a misuse or even abuse of the science

Individual responsibilities of researchers

- Critical of their motivation to work with a certain population
- Be change agents and committed to their communities
- Follows the community leads to identify needs and issues
- Acknowledges their privilege and power and how it impacts the community
- Uses their privilege and power to address the needs of the community

WHY?

- Research is public funded
- Research is carried out in the name of society as an expression and reflection of the society's needs, interests, priorities and expected impacts
- Social accountability can generate information about causes of and strategies to address the collective needs of the community and eliminate disparities.
- Social expectations/obligations of researcher as a global citizen
  - A form of “enlightened self interest”

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Breakout Groups

Building social accountability into the research process

- *Group 1:* Developing a research idea & applying for funding
- *Group 2:* Assembling a research team
- *Group 3:* Obtaining ethics approval
- *Group 4:* Recruitment & Data Collection
- *Group 5:* Data Analysis
- *Group 6:* Knowledge Dissemination & Translation

Menti code: 8279 7608

What are some "points to consider" when building social accountability at different stages of the research process

Developing a research idea & applying for funding

- What is your motivation?
- Considering existing research/your literature review– is your research idea efficient and a suitable use of public funds?
- What are the gaps in the field? In populations?
- Is there past research that has not included visible or non-visible minority groups that should be considered?
- Are you partnering & consulting with relevant stakeholders (patient or community groups) on needs, gaps and relevant outcomes?

Developing a research idea & applying for funding

- Are you following the “old way” of doing things or are you considering new approaches, paradigms, methodologies, perspectives, and outcomes?
- What are the true limitations of your population of interest? How can you make it more diverse and inclusive?
- How does the program/drug/disease/issue affect different populations?
- What do people in the community want to have researched?
- Have you thought through a variety of accessible knowledge disseminations approaches? How are you effecting change?

Building a research team

- Who is on the team?
- Is it diverse to support variety in thoughts, ideas and experiences? Your team makeup can impact participants' perception of safety in engaging with your team
- Does it include members of the population of interest for your study? ("nothing about us, without us")
- Are your teams and staff trained to be culturally sensitive and to address their unconscious biases?
- Is psychological safety part of your values? Team members should be able to ask questions & make mistakes without fear

Obtaining ethics approval

- Can someone outside of your specific field, read and understand your application?
- Have you piloted your study instrument beyond your research team and colleagues? i.e. with members of the population of interest
- Have you considered all potential sources of harm? How will you mitigate these?
- Have you (again) considered outcomes and limitations beyond the status quo? Did you survey the community or patient population for these?

Recruitment & Data Collection

- Are your methods of recruitment truly accessible? e.g. descriptive captions for images, live transcripts/closed-captions for audio & video, plain language, health literacy in recruitment materials
- How are you maximizing diversity in recruitment?
  - Do your recruitment materials reflect the diversity of the population you are trying to recruit?
- How are you making your research team visible and accessible (where appropriate) to encourage participants to engage, and feel safe and represented:
  - E.g. “when a racialized participant expressed to an RA that she joined our qualitative study because she noticed the RA was of the same ethnicity as her (based on her name), we posted profiles and pictures of each of our interviewers on Facebook to improve our approachability” (via Janelle Panday)

Recruitment & Data Collection

- How do you encourage and enable participants to trust you?
- How can you accommodate special circumstances? E.g. Participants only available outside working hours, older adults might need a family member present at the interview
- Do the participants feel represented in the surveys. E.g. right language in demographic questions, cultural sensitivity in interview questions

Data Analysis

- Are all relevant outcomes of interest included (if possible)?
- Who is involved in the analysis process? All team members should be involved or informed at some level including patient or community partners
- What are the individual characteristics that may contribute to bias in data analysis (considering implications for quantitative & qualitative methodologies)
- Are you reporting any negative or “empty” findings?

Knowledge Dissemination & Translation

- Did you plan this from the beginning of the research process?
- Did you ask your stakeholder group what methods are best?
- Are you using multiple methods of dissemination & translation that are truly accessible and widely available?
- Are you inviting your patient or community partners to present this work and speak on behalf of the team? Are they included in the manuscript writing process?
- What change are you aiming to effect with this work?
- How are you establishing long term relationships with the community?
- How are you making sure your research findings are correctly affecting policy change?

Additional resources

- Recruitment of Underrepresented Study Populations
- Social accountability in research section in TRAction – coming soon
- DFM Cultural Sensitivity Training – coming soon
- Institutional Self-Assessment Social Accountability Tool (ISAT) - https://socialaccountabilityhealth.org/

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As individuals and researchers, it is our duty to be socially responsible at each step of the research process. Only by doing so, can we truly contribute to creating more equitable health systems.

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Networking Activity: Lost in Translation

Breaking news!

- In your small groups, review the abstract provided in the link for your room number ONLY
- Create one “click bait” headline and one more socially responsible headline for the same paper
- Nominate a spokesperson to share in the larger group
  - Provide your “click bait” headline
  - Opportunity for everyone to guess at what the findings of the paper were based on that headline
  - Share your socially responsible headline