

The Cost of Operating IRBs

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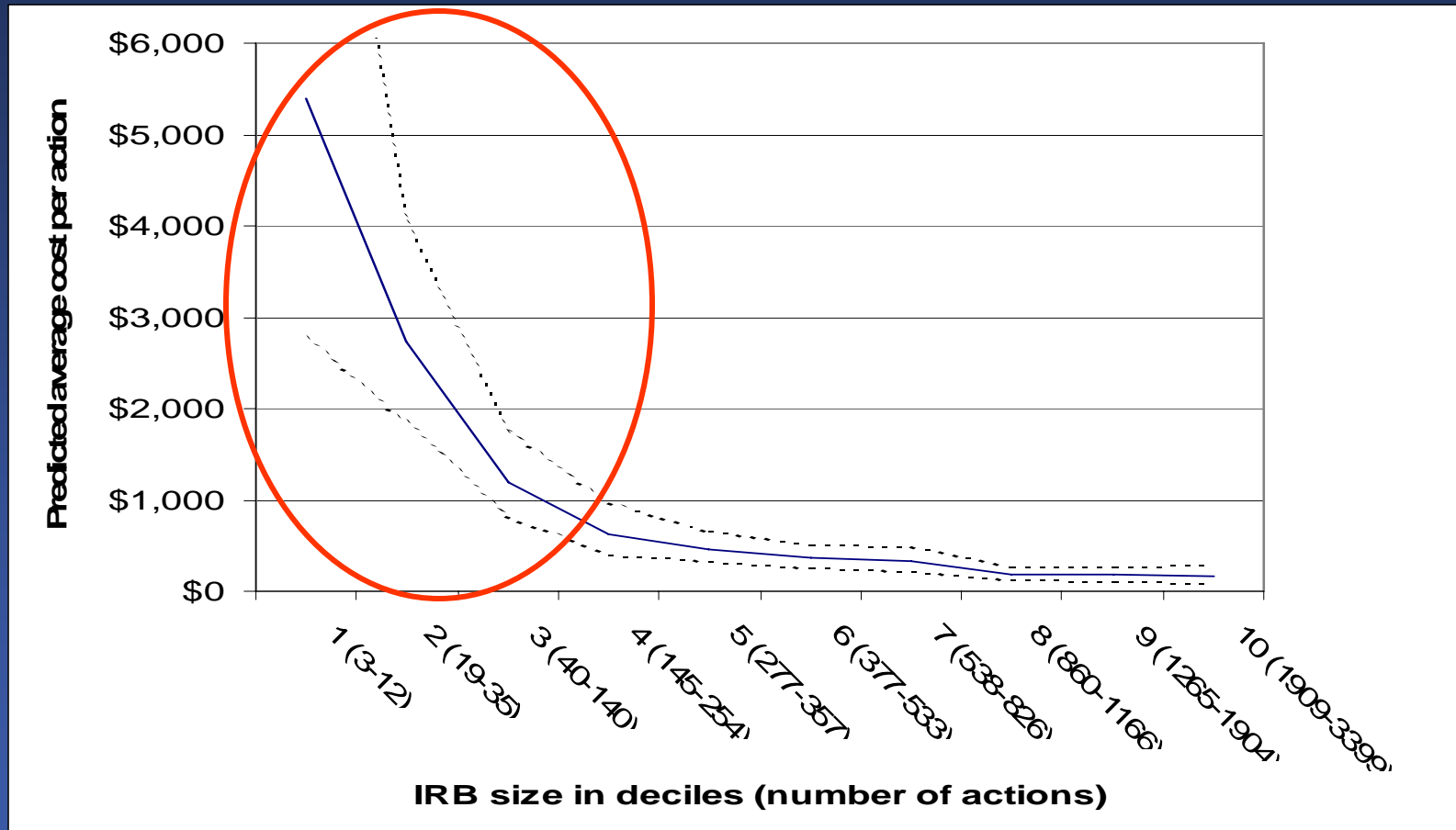
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The Cost of Running an IRB

- The average human subjects office:
 - cost approx. \$180,000 (2001 dollars)
 - processed 670 actions per year, including 74 full-board initial reviews
- \$1,115 per action (SD=\$1,747)

T.H. Wagner, A.M. Cruz and G.L. Chadwick, "Economies of Scale in Institutional Review Boards," *Medical Care* 42, no. 8 (2004): 817-823.

Large Economies of Scale



T.H. Wagner, A.M. Cruz and G.L. Chadwick, "Economies of Scale in Institutional Review Boards," *Medical Care* 42, no. 8 (2004): 817-823.

Implications

- Strong evidence for economies of scale
- Small IRBs should consider
 - Contracting with a local IRB
 - Creating a regional co-op
- Medium and large IRBs should consider
 - “Farming out” protocols when cost of internal review > cost of external review

Is the Current System Sustainable?

Institutional Review Boards



More regulations,
resulting in greater
requirements (and
costs) for IRBs



Budget is constrained
by parent institution



More research
and it is
increasingly
diverse and
complex



Volunteers: Half of
IRB chairs receive no
compensation and
they work 7 hrs per
week

Improving Efficiency Nationally

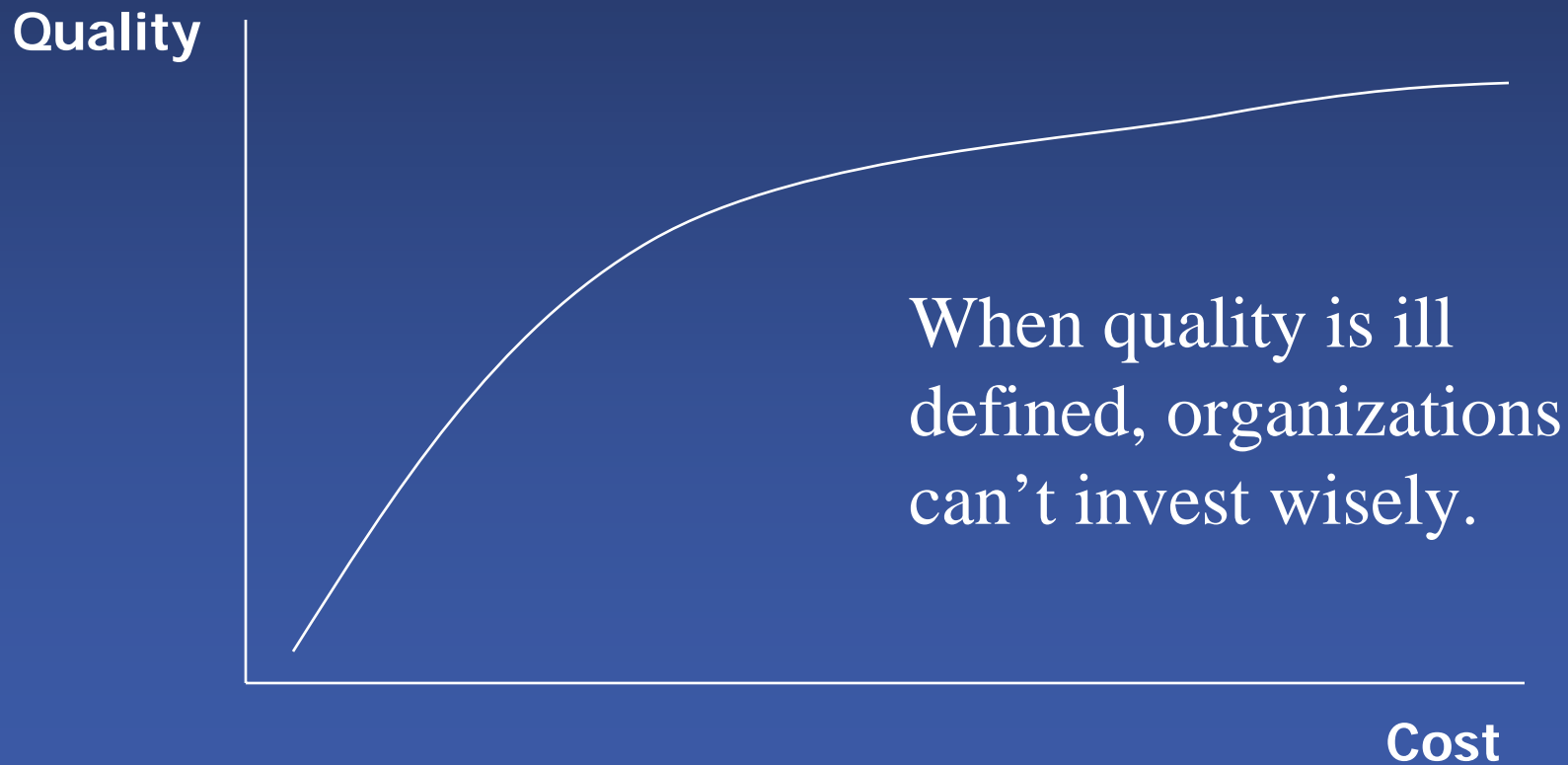
- Create a prospective payment system
 - Create incentives that reward efficiency, innovation, and quality improvement
 - Allows for considerable flexibility in ownership
- Downside
 - Gains in efficiency could come at the expense of quality

Quality Roadblock

- No consensus on quality (and how to measure it at the protocol level)
- A high-quality process should reduce the likelihood of a poor outcome

Cost-Quality Curve

Where are you on this curve?



Data Roadblock

- We need “process” data
- Data are critical for
 - Quality improvement
 - Risk management
 - Maintaining morale among IRB staff, administration, researchers

Roadmap for Improvements

- Data on processes
- Define quality
- By using “evidence-based” methods, we can use these data to improve quality to achieve a cost-effective system