The Cost of Operating IRBs

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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)

Large Economies of Scale

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
- More research and it is increasingly diverse and complex
- Volunteers: Half of IRB chairs receive no compensation and they work 7 hrs per week
- Budget is constrained by parent institution
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?

When quality is ill defined, organizations can’t invest wisely.
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