



Women Dental College, (WDC)
Murree Road, Abbottabad KPK, Pakistan

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RESEARCH CELL & RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

INTRODUCTION

Background and Institutional Context

Women Dental College (WDC), Abbottabad, is a dental institution dedicated to providing quality dental education and promoting evidence-based clinical practice in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Research is a cornerstone of academic and professional excellence. In recognition of this, the College has established a formal Research Cell tasked with fostering a culture of scholarly inquiry, supporting evidence-based practice and ensuring that all research activities conducted within or under the auspices of WDC adhere to the highest ethical standards.

Purpose of This Document

To define the structure, mandate and operational procedures of the WDC Research Cell.

To establish a Research Ethics Policy governing all research activities undertaken by faculty, postgraduate students, undergraduate students, and any affiliated researchers.

Vision and Mission of the Research Cell

Vision: To be a recognized centre of research excellence that advances oral health science, promotes innovation and contributes to national and global health outcomes.

Mission: To build a sustainable research culture at WDC by supporting high-quality, ethically conducted research that addresses relevant oral health challenges, develops the research capacities of students and faculty, and disseminates knowledge through peer-reviewed publications and scholarly platforms.



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WDC RESEARCH CELL

Establishment and Mandate

The WDC Research Cell is an officially sanctioned body operating under the authority of the Department of Medical Education, the College Principal and the Academic Council. It serves as the central administrative and advisory body for all research-related activities within the institution.

The Research Cell is mandated to:

- Promote, support and coordinate research activities across all departments.
- Develop institutional research policies and guidelines.
- Facilitate collaboration with national and international research institutions.
- Manage research funding, grants and scholarships.
- Ensure ethical compliance of all research projects.
- Maintain a repository of all research conducted at WDC.
- Encourage publication in peer-reviewed journals and presentation at scientific forums.

Organizational Structure

The Research Cell is comprised of the following roles and bodies:

Position / Body	Role & Responsibilities
Director (Research Cell)	Senior faculty member appointed by the Principal; overall leadership, policy decisions, external representation
Research Cell Manager & Assistant Manager	Day-to-day administration, maintaining records, scheduling meetings, communicating with researchers
Research Associate	Literature reviews, data collection, manuscript write-up and managing the ethical submission and publication process.
Research Ethics Committee (REC)	Independent ethics review body; reviews, approves, monitors research for ethical compliance
Research Advisory	Provides strategic governance, proposal peer-review,



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Committee (RAC)

research policy formulation, and capacity-building support.

IT & Library Support

Provides database access, reference management, plagiarism detection, data storage support

Research Cell Operations

Meetings

The Research Ethics Committee (REC) shall meet at a minimum once per quarter. Emergency meetings may be convened by the Chairperson at any time. Minutes of all meetings shall be recorded and maintained.

Research Registration

All research projects whether undergraduate research, faculty research or external research or funded projects must be formally registered with the Research Cell before commencement. The registration form shall include:

- Title and principal investigator details
- Study design and methodology summary
- Expected timeline and budget
- Ethics approval reference number (upon obtaining REC clearance)

Research Repository

The Research Cell shall maintain a digital repository of all completed research projects and publications. This repository shall be accessible to all faculty and students for reference and anti-plagiarism purposes.

RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

Research ethics is the application of fundamental moral principles to research activities. All research involving human subjects, patient data, biological specimens or animals must be conducted in conformity with universally accepted ethical standards. This policy is informed by and consistent with the following foundational frameworks:

- The Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013 revision)
- The Belmont Report (1979) — Respect for Persons, Beneficence, Justice
- International Conference on Harmonisation — Good Clinical Practice (ICH-GCP)
https://database.ich.org/sites/default/files/ICH_E6%28R3%29_Step4_FinalGuideline_2025_0106.pdf



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Scope of the Ethics Policy

This policy applies to all research activities conducted:

- Within WDC premises or its affiliated hospitals
- By WDC faculty, staff or students, regardless of location
- Using WDC resources, including data, equipment or patient records
- Under collaborative arrangements with external institutions where WDC is a co-investigator

It covers research involving:

- Human subjects (patients, volunteers, healthy controls)
- Human biological specimens (saliva, blood, tissue, extracted teeth)
- Patient medical or dental records (retrospective or prospective)
- Surveys, questionnaires and interviews with identifiable participants
- Laboratory studies with potential biological hazards

Core Ethical Principles

Principle	Application in Dental Research
Respect for Persons (Autonomy)	Every participant has the right to decide whether to participate. Informed consent must be obtained before any data collection or intervention.
Beneficence	Research must aim to improve oral health knowledge or practice. Procedures must offer potential benefit and use the least invasive methods necessary.
Non-Maleficence	Researchers must not expose participants to unnecessary risk. All procedures must be clinically sound and performed by competent personnel.
Justice	Participant selection must be equitable. Vulnerable populations must be protected; benefits and burdens of research must be fairly distributed.
Integrity & Honesty	Data must be accurately recorded, reported, and not fabricated, falsified, or selectively presented.
Confidentiality	All personal and health information of participants must be kept strictly confidential and protected from unauthorized



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disclosure.

INFROMED CONSENT

General Requirements

Informed consent is a fundamental ethical and legal requirement for research involving human participants. Consent must be truly voluntary, based on adequate information, and given by a person with the capacity to decide.

Elements of Valid Informed Consent

The informed consent process must ensure that each participant is provided, in a language they understand, with the following information:

- The nature and purpose of the research study
- The procedures to be followed, including any experimental or investigational aspects
- Foreseeable risks, discomforts or adverse effects
- Expected benefits to the participant or to society
- Available alternative treatments or procedures (where applicable)
- Confidentiality measures and data protection protocols
- Compensation (if any) for participation or injury
- Contact information for the Principal Investigator
- The voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty

Special Consent Situations

Minors and Children

When research involves participants below the age of 18, written informed consent must be obtained from parents or legal guardians. Additionally, assent (age-appropriate verbal or written agreement) must be obtained from children. Researchers must ensure that the child does not feel coerced.

Cognitively Impaired Individuals



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Where a potential participant lacks capacity to provide informed consent, a legally authorized representative must consent on their behalf. The participant's assent should still be sought where possible.

Illiterate Participants

Where a participant is unable to read or write, the consent form shall be read aloud in the participant's native language. An impartial witness (not a member of the research team) must be present and sign the consent form to confirm that the participant was given adequate information and freely consented.

Retrospective Studies using Existing Records

Research using existing anonymized patient records may be exempted from individual informed consent requirements, subject to REC approval. Researchers must demonstrate that the data have been de-identified and that re-identification is not possible.

Consent Documentation

All signed consent forms must be:

- Retained by the Principal Investigator for a minimum of five (5) years post-study completion
- Stored in a secure, locked location inaccessible to unauthorized individuals
- Available for inspection by the REC or regulatory authorities upon request

PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Certain groups require additional protections due to limited autonomy, susceptibility to coercion or special circumstances. Researchers working with any of the following populations must obtain specific REC approval and implement additional safeguards:

Vulnerable Group	Additional Safeguards Required
Children and Minors (< 18 years)	Parental/guardian consent + child assent; research must directly benefit the child or present only minimal risk
Pregnant Women	Exclusion from studies with potential fetal risk unless the research cannot be conducted with other populations and presents minimal risk
Cognitively Impaired Individuals	Surrogate consent required; periodic re-assessment of capacity; research must benefit the individual or the group they represent



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Economically Disadvantaged Persons	Compensation must not be unduly inducing; alternative treatment must be available irrespective of participation
Students / Employees of WDC	Participation must be voluntary with no academic/employment pressure; researchers must be independent of supervisory roles
Patients in Emergency Situations	Waiver of consent may be sought from ERC; next-of-kin consent as soon as possible; deferred consent protocol

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Definition

A conflict of interest (COI) exists when a researcher has a financial, professional or personal relationship that could unduly influence or could appear to influence the design, conduct, reporting or review of research.

Disclosure Requirements

All researchers must disclose the following at the time of REC submission and in any resulting publication:

- Financial relationships with sponsors, manufacturers, or industry (including honoraria, consultancy fees, grants, stock ownership)
- Intellectual property interests (patents, royalties)
- Familial or personal relationships with individuals who may be affected by the research
- Institutional conflicts (e.g., departmental financial interest in the research outcome)

Management of Conflicts

Upon disclosure, the REC shall determine appropriate management strategies, which may include:

- Monitoring of the research by an independent data safety monitoring committee
- Exclusion of the conflicted individual from certain decisions or activities
- Transparent disclosure in all publications and presentations
- In cases of serious unmanageable conflicts, disqualification from the research



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POLICY COMPLIANCE, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Compliance

Compliance with this policy is mandatory for all individuals undertaking research at or under the auspices of Women Dental College. Non-compliance may result in suspension of research activities, withdrawal of REC approval.

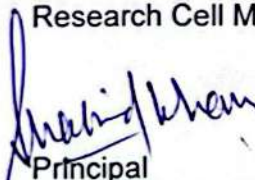
Monitoring

The Research Cell and REC shall monitor ongoing research through:

- Annual progress reports from Principal Investigators of all registered projects
- Review of adverse event and protocol deviation reports
- Post-publication review to ensure published findings are consistent with approved protocols

Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed every three (3) years or earlier if required by changes in national regulations, PMDC/HEC guidelines or international ethical standards. The Research Cell Manager is responsible for initiating and overseeing the review process.


Principal
Women Dental College
Abbottabad

updated

Copy to:

1. All Directors
2. Principal and Vice Principal WDC
3. Director Research Cell
4. Chair RAC and REC, WDC
5. Office Copy
6. LMS Manager