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Ethics Committees and Gender

Although many aspects of clinical research are addressed in laws and guidelines, there is only rudimentary advice about gender aspects. The issue applies in two ways: 1. the representation of women among the members of an Ethics Committee. There are no quotas for gender representation nor 2. recommendations for the inclusion of women in clinical research projects. There needs to be more awareness within the scientific community in order to guarantee the inclusion of men and women of all ages according to acknowledged scientific principles like the prevalence of the disease in research projects. Focus should be given in particular to women of childbearing potential.

The Ethics Committee of the Medical University of Vienna has issued guidelines for the inclusion of women in clinical research projects already in the year 2004. Furthermore the Austrian Bioethics Commission is considering gender aspects as crossover issue in all its decisions. It has published a recommendation with gender reference for Ethics Committees and Clinical Studies in the year 2008. In the same year the Italian National Bioethics Committee has published its recommendation "Pharmacological trials on women". National advisory bodies like Bioethics Committees should strive to include gender issues to raise awareness on a national level.

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