



L-Università ta' Malta
Faculty of Medicine & Surgery

DISTINCTION BETWEEN AUDIT AND RESEARCH

Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC)
Faculty of Medicine and Surgery

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Distinction between Audit and Research

- Research and audit have many similarities and unfortunately distinction is at best difficult.
- Both intend to ask a question and to change or influence clinical practice.
- Both require formal data collection on patients and both depend on appropriate method and design to reach sound conclusions. These standards for audit should be at least as high as for research, if only because audits often lead to change more than research.
- The major bureaucratic distinction between audit and research is that research investigates what should be done, while an audit investigates whether it is being done (and if not, why not).
- The difficulties to overcome the distinction between audit and research lies with the researcher, who must take on the responsibility. The distinction is important because so many consequences follow, often irrationally. Such distinction is also important even when applying for ethical approval.
- Documents distinguishing audit from research often do not discuss the moral issues. It is worth considering additional scrutiny.
- Morality relates to any situations in which there are conflict of values (e.g. research with post mortem material now always requires ethical review)
- The ethical part helps identify what actions are morally acceptable or preferred and compatible with the societal values. To help decide we need to ask the following:
 - a. How much does this deviate from current clinical practice?
 - b. What is the additional burden on the patients or others?
 - c. What additional risks are being imposed?
 - d. What benefit might accrue patients?
 - e. What potential benefits we have to society?