1. **OBJECTIVE**

   The objective of these University of Zambia Biomedical Research Ethics Committee (UNZAREC) Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) is to contribute to the effective functioning of the Committee, so that a quality and consistent ethical review mechanism for Health and Biomedical Research is put in place and followed for all proposals dealt with by the Committee as prescribed by international ethical guidelines for biomedical research on human participants.

   The review process will be governed by internationally recognized principles including the Nuremberg Code of Human Rights (1947), The World Medical Association’s Declaration of Helsinki (1964-2000), the CIOMS International Guidelines for Biomedical Research involving Human Subjects (2001), the WHO and the ICH Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice (1995), the Belmont Report (1979), and the National Health Research Committee guidelines. These guidelines are a standard for the ethics review of any research involving human participants. Further the day to day review process will also be governed by the Regulations and Guidelines on Clinical Investigator & IRB Responsibilities (2003) code of federal regulations. All research will be done in accordance with the Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies.

2. **ROLE OF RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

   The Research Ethics Committee will review all types of research proposals involving human participants and vertebrate animals with a view to safeguard the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of all actual and potential research participants or
animal subjects. The goals of research, however important, shall never be permitted to override the health, well-being and care of research participants/subjects.

The Research Ethics Committee will take care to ensure that all the cardinal principles of research ethics, viz. Autonomy, Beneficence, Non-maleficence and Justice, are taken care of in the planning, conduct and reporting of the proposed research. For this purpose, it will look into the aspects of the informed consent process, risk/benefit ratio, distribution of burdens and benefits and provisions for appropriate compensation wherever required. It will review the proposals before the start of the study as well as monitor the research throughout the study until and after completion of the study through appropriate well-documented procedures, for example progress reports, final reports, and site visits. The Committee will also examine compliance with all regulatory requirements, applicable guidelines and laws.

3. COMPOSITION OF THE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Biomedical Research Ethics Committee shall be multidisciplinary and multisectoral in composition. Independence and competence are the two hallmarks of a Research Ethics Committee.

The membership of UNZAREC will include individuals with varying backgrounds, possessing appropriate professional competencies to review the diverse types of protocols that are received.
The Committee shall consist of fifteen members comprising:

- School of Medicine representative
- UTH representative
- Basic medical scientists
- Clinicians (Medical and Veterinary)
- Social scientist/Biostatistician/Epidemiologist
- Ministry of Health Representative
- Legal expert
- Philosopher/Theologian/Bioethicist
- Theologian from the community

The Committee will elect its own Chairperson and Vice.

The Committee shall have adequate representation of age and gender in order to safeguard the interests and welfare of all sections of the community/society. Members shall be aware of local social and cultural norms, as this is the most important social control mechanism. They shall be appointed by the Vice-Chancellor on recommendation of the Dean, School of Medicine, based on their competencies and integrity, and could be drawn from any public or private institution from anywhere in the country. If required, subject experts will be invited to offer their views on specific issues.

4. **MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS**

- The duration of appointment is initially for a period of three years;
- At the end of three years, the Committee shall be reconstituted, and 50% of the members will be replaced by the appointing authority;
• No member shall serve more than two consecutive terms;
• A member can be replaced in the event of resignation, death or non-availability, or for any action not commensurate with the responsibilities laid down in the guidelines;
• A member who absents himself/herself from three consecutive meetings shall cease to be a member;
• A member shall sign a confidentiality agreement regarding meeting deliberations, applications, information on research participants and related matters; in addition, all UNZAREC administrative staff shall sign a similar confidentiality agreement.

5. CONDITIONS OF APPOINTMENT

A statement of the conditions of appointment shall be drawn up that includes the following:
• A member shall be willing to publicise his/her full name, profession, and affiliation;
• All reimbursement for work and expenses, if any, within or related to UNZAREC affairs shall be recorded and made available to the people concerned upon request.

6. QUORUM REQUIREMENTS

A minimum of seven members shall constitute a quorum. No quorum shall consist entirely of members of one profession or gender. A quorum shall include at least one member who is a non-scientist.
7. **OFFICES**

The Chairperson will conduct all meetings of the Biomedical Research Ethics Committee. If the Chairperson is not available, the Vice-Chairperson or alternate Chairperson elected from the members present will conduct the meeting. The Administrative Secretary is responsible for organizing the meetings, maintaining the records and communicating with all concerned. He/She will prepare the minutes of the meetings and get them approved by the Chairperson before communicating outcomes to the researchers.

8. **INDEPENDENT CONSULTANTS**

The Research Ethics Committee may call upon independent consultants who may provide expertise to UNZAREC on specific research protocols. These consultants may be specialists in ethical or legal aspects, specific diseases or methodologies, or they may be representatives of communities, patients or special interest groups. The consultants will be paid an honorarium for protocols reviewed.

9. **EDUCATION OF UNZAREC MEMBERS**

The UNZAREC members shall have initial and continued education regarding the ethics and science of research.

10. **APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

- All proposals shall be submitted in the prescribed application format, the details of which are given under Documentation;
- All relevant documents shall be enclosed with the application form;
- The required number of copies of the proposal along with the application and documents in the prescribed format duly signed by the Principal Investigator (PI) shall be forwarded to
the Research Ethics Committee;
• Where the Principal Investigator is not locally based the Co-
  Principal Investigator must be a resident;
• The prescribed fees shall be remitted along with the
  application.

11. DOCUMENTATION

For a thorough and complete review, all research proposals
shall be submitted with the following information:

• Name of the applicant with designation;
• Name of the institute/hospital/field area where the research
  will be conducted;
• Approval of the Head of the Department/Institution, and the
  relevant scientific review Committee where present;
• The protocol of the proposed research according to the
  prescribed UNZAREC format;
• Ethical issues in the study and plans to address these issues;
• All relevant enclosures like case report forms, questionnaires,
  follow-up cards, etc;
• The informed consent process, including patient information
  sheet and informed consent form in English and the local
  language where necessary;
• For any drug/device trial, all relevant preclinical animal data
  and clinical trial data from other centres within the country or
  outside as the case may be;
• The curriculum vitae of all the investigators with relevant
  publications in the last five years;
• All Principal Investigators must show evidence of having
  undergone basic training in Research Ethics, and in the case of
  clinical trials, Good Clinical Practice (GCP) training as well;
• Any regulatory clearance required;
• A detailed budget and source of funding;
• Other financial issues including those related to insurance;
• An agreement to report all serious adverse events promptly to UNZAREC;
• A statement of any conflict of interest;
• An agreement to comply with the relevant national and applicable international guidelines;
• A statement describing any compensation for study participation (including expenses and access to medical care) to be given to research participants; a description of the arrangements for indemnity, if applicable (in study-related injuries); a description of the arrangements for insurance coverage for research participants, if applicable; all significant previous decisions (e.g. those leading to a negative decision or modified protocol) by other ethics committees or regulatory authorities for the proposed study (whether in the same location or elsewhere) and an indication of the modification(s) to the protocol made on that account. The reasons for negative decisions shall be provided;
• Plans for publication of results – positive or negative – while maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of the study participants;
• Any other information relevant to the study.

12. REVIEW PROCEDURES

• Meetings will normally be held at the School of Medicine, and be convened once a month or more often if necessary. Meetings will be held usually on the last Wednesday of every month, to consider research proposals submitted on or before the first Friday of that month;
- The proposals will be sent to three reviewers at least two weeks before the meeting: all other members shall receive a summary.
- Decisions will be taken by consensus after discussion, and whenever needed voting will be done;
- Researchers will be invited to offer clarifications if need be;
- Independent consultants/experts will be invited to offer their opinion on specific research proposals if need be;
- The proceedings of the meeting will be minuted and decisions will be communicated in writing;
- If revision is to be made, the revised document in the required number of copies shall be submitted.

13. ELEMENTS OF REVIEW

The Committee will pay special attention to the following:

A. Scientific design and conduct of the study

- Adequate background information and literature review;
- The appropriateness of the study design in relation to the objectives of the study, the methodology, the statistical analysis including sample size calculation and the potential for reaching sound conclusions with the smallest number of research participants;
- The justification of predictable risks and inconveniences weighed against the anticipated benefits for the research participants and the concerned communities;
- The justification for the use of control arms;
- The criteria for prematurely withdrawing research participants;
- The criteria for suspending or terminating the research as a whole;
• The adequacy of provisions made for monitoring and auditing the conduct of the research, including the constitution of a Data and Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB) or Oversight Committee;
• The adequacy of the site including the supporting staff, available facilities and emergency procedures;
• The manner in which the results of the research will be reported and published.

B Recruitment of research participants

• The characteristics of the population from which the research participants will be drawn (including gender, age, literacy, culture, economic status, and ethnicity);
• The means by which initial contact and recruitment is to be conducted;
• The means by which full information is to be conveyed to potential research participants or their representatives;
• Inclusion criteria for research participants;
• Exclusion criteria for research participants.

C Care and protection of research participants

• The competence of the investigator(s) (qualifications, experience, etc.) to carry out the proposed study;
• Any plans to withdraw or withhold standard therapies for the purpose of the research and the justification for such action;
• The medical care to be provided to research participants during and after the course of the research;
• The adequacy of medical supervision and psychosocial support of the research participants;
• Steps to be taken if research participants voluntarily withdraw during the course of the research;
• The criteria for extended access to, the emergency use of, and/or the compassionate use of study products;
• The arrangement, if appropriate, for informing a research participant’s general practitioner (family doctor), including procedures for seeking the participant’s consent to do so;
• A description of any plans to make the study product available to the research participants following the research;
• A description of any financial cost to the research participant;
• The rewards and compensations for research participants (including money, services and/or gifts);
• The provisions for compensation/treatment in the case of injury/disability/death of a research participant attributable to participation in the research;
• The insurance and indemnity arrangements, if required.

D Protection of research participants’ confidentiality

• The people who will have access to personal data of the research participants, including medical records and biological samples;
• The measures taken to ensure the confidentiality and security of personal information concerning research participants.

E Biological specimens

• A full description of any specimens that will be collected (blood, body fluids, tissue biopsies, etc.);
• Plans for obtaining consent and clearance from participants and UNZAREC or other relevant authorities for long-term storage, export, and future research;
• Arrangements for disposal.
Samples may be allowed to be imported or exported if:
• they have been proved to be safe and non-hazardous to the community;
• and there is a clear material transfer agreement.
• all exported/imported samples/specimens shall be used only for the purpose indicated in the research proposal.

F Informed consent process

• A full description of the process for obtaining informed consent, including the identification of those responsible for obtaining the consent;
• The adequacy, completeness and understandability of written and oral information to be given to the research participants, and, when appropriate, their legally acceptable representative(s);
• Clear justification for the intention to include in the research individuals who cannot consent, and a full account of the arrangements for obtaining consent or authorisation for the participation of such individuals;
• Assurance that research participants will receive information that becomes available during the course of the research relevant to their participation (including their rights, safety and well-being), provision for informing the participants in case of any amendments to the protocol.
• The provisions made for receiving and responding to queries and complaints from research participants or their representatives during the course of a research project;
G Community considerations

- The impact and relevance of the research on the local community from which the research participants are drawn and on the wider concerned communities and the environment;
- The steps taken to consult with the concerned communities during the course of designing the research;
- The influence of the community on the consent of the individuals;
- Proposed community consultation during the course of the research;
- The extent to which the research contributes to capacity-building, such as the enhancement of local healthcare, research, and the ability to respond to public health needs;
- A description of the availability and affordability of any successful study product to the concerned communities following the research;
- The manner in which the results of the research will be made available to the research participants and the concerned communities.

H Vulnerable populations

- Documentation on how the researcher will protect the rights and welfare of special categories of the population, i.e. children, pregnant women, refugees, prisoners, elderly persons, orphans, etc.
14. EXPEDITED REVIEW

All revised proposals, unless specifically required to go to the main committee, will be examined at a meeting of identified members convened by the Chairman to expedite decision-making. Expedited review may also be undertaken in cases of nationally relevant proposals requiring urgent review, e.g. to address national epidemiological concerns. The same procedure may be used by the Chairman for proposals that are deemed to involve no more than minimal risk.

All REC members shall be informed at the next regular meeting of research proposals which have been approved under this procedure.

15. DECISION-MAKING

- Members will discuss the various issues before arriving at a consensus;
- A member shall withdraw from the meeting before the review process concerning an application where a conflict of interest exists, and this shall be communicated to the Chairperson prior to the review of the application and recorded in the minutes;
- Decisions will be made only in meetings where a quorum is constituted;
- Only members can make the decision. The independent consultants will only offer their opinions in writing; or they may be invited to a meeting but will not participate in the decision-making;
- A decision may be to approve, revise, or reject a proposal. Specific suggestions for modifications and reasons for rejection shall be given;
• In cases of conditional decisions, clear suggestions for revision and the procedure for having the application resubmitted shall be specified;
• Amended proposals may be reviewed through an expedited review process by identified members or the Chairperson;
• Researchers can appeal against the decision to the Vice-Chancellor through the Dean, School of Medicine.

16. COMMUNICATING THE DECISION

A decision shall be communicated in writing to the applicant within two weeks of the meeting at which the decision was made. The communication of the decision shall include the following:

• The name and title of the applicant;
• The exact title of the research proposal reviewed;
• A clear identification of the protocol of the proposed research or amendment, including the date and version number (if applicable) on which the decision has been made;
• The names and (where possible) specific identification numbers (version numbers/dates) of the documents reviewed, including the potential research participant information sheet/material and informed consent form;
• The date and place of the decision;
• A clear statement of the decision reached;
• Any advice by UNZAREC;
• In the case of a conditional decision, any requirements by UNZAREC including suggestions for revision and the procedure for having the application resubmitted;
• In the case of a positive decision, a statement of the responsibilities of the applicant: for example, confirmation (Researcher to sign that he/she will comply to the conditions) of acceptance of any requirements imposed by UNZAREC,
submission of Progress Report(s), the need to notify UNZAREC in cases of protocol amendments, the need to report serious adverse events related to the conduct of the study, the need to report unforeseen circumstances, the termination of the study, or significant decisions by other ethics committees;
• In the case of a negative decision, clearly stated reasons for the negative decision;
• Signature (dated) of the Chairperson (or other authorised person) of UNZAREC;
• The Vice Chancellor shall be informed about research proposals which have been Approved, rejected etc;
• Study sites shall be monitored at anytime/day by this Committee.

17. FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES

• Progress Reports shall be submitted to UNZAREC every six months and will be reviewed at the monthly meetings;
• The Final Report shall be submitted at the end of the study;
• All serious adverse events and the interventions undertaken shall be reported;
• Any protocol deviation, if any, shall be reported with adequate justifications;
• Any amendment to the protocol shall be submitted for approval before implementation;
• Premature termination of the study shall be notified with reasons, along with a summary of the data obtained so far;
• Any change of investigators/sites shall be reported to UNZAREC;
• The decision of a follow-up review shall be issued and communicated to the applicant, including any modification, suspension, or termination of UNZAREC’s original decision or confirmation that the decision is still valid;
• The reports of Data and Safety Monitoring Boards and Oversight Committees, where applicable, shall be submitted to UNZAREC regularly.

18. RECORD-KEEPING AND ARCHIVING

The following documents shall be kept by the UNZAREC Secretariat:

• Written Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) of UNZAREC;
• The Curriculum vitae (CV) of all members of UNZAREC;
• A record of all income and expenses of UNZAREC, including allowances and reimbursements made to the Secretariat and UNZAREC members;
• Copies of all study protocols with enclosed documents, progress reports, and adverse events reports;
• Minutes of all meetings duly signed by the Chairperson;
• Copies of all existing relevant national and international guidelines on research ethics and laws along with any amendments;
• Copies of all correspondence with members, researchers and others, including national regulatory bodies;
• Final reports of completed approved projects;
• UNZAREC shall compile and disseminate an annual report of its activities.
All documents shall be archived for a minimum period of three years.

19. **UPDATING UNZAREC MEMBERS**

- All relevant new guidelines shall be brought to the attention of the members;
- Members shall be encouraged to attend national and international training programmes in research ethics in order to maintain quality in ethical review and to keep aware of the latest developments in this area.
REFERENCES