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Ethical and Legal Aspects of Sensory and Eating Behaviour Research: A Pragmatic Approach

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Resume: Sensory science needs human volunteers to carry out experiments. Such research requires that both the subjects and researchers be aware of the ethical and legal issues involved. Thus, biomedical research, defined as research conducted on humans to develop biological knowledge, is submitted to both strict international ethical standards and national legislation/laws to protect the persons involved in the research. Despite adherence to such standards, laws, and legislation, sensory scientists can feel helpless when faced with these issues. There are two main reasons for this: (1) sensory science may, from time to time, transcend the traditional parameters of biomedical research; and (2) the legal requirements for clinical trials may at times be disproportionate for sensory research protocols and thus extremely difficult if not impossible to apply. Although there is no clear legal framework for conducting sensory research per se, some general guidelines should be adopted to fit the nature, objectives and specificity of the research so as to protect the rights and safety of the subject participants. The overriding concern, of course, is the well-being of the subjects. In embarking on biomedical research, therefore, sensory scientists do not have to be bogged down by applying systematically some rather arbitrary biomedical legislation, but they should take into consideration the broad legal and public policy dimensions of the ethical issues involved in such research. This, then, is the challenge for those engaged in sensory and eating behaviour research.

Keywords: sensory study, eating behaviour, ethics, clinical trial, biomedical research.

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