Research Participant Compensation

The ORA was recently asked the following question: When has a volunteer participated in a study long enough to earn compensation, and how much compensation does he/she earn?

The regulations allow compensation to volunteers for their participation in research if the compensation does not create undue influence. The IRB must review all forms of compensation (e.g., gift certificates, money, drawings, recognition lunches) to ensure that: 1) the amount is not at a level that creates undue influence; 2) the compensation is not administered in such a way that creates an impression that the investigator is coercing the subject to continue in a study, or is punishing the subject for non-compliance.

Compensation should be a form of recognition for the investment of the volunteer’s time, loss of wages, or other inconvenience incurred. The amount of compensation should be based on the amount of the volunteer’s time spent and/or reasonable expenses incurred during his/her participation in the research.

Accordingly, compensation may not be withheld contingent on the subject's completion of the study. For example, the investigator cannot require that a subject complete all parts/portions of a survey instrument or answer every question in order to receive compensation. In most cases involving continued participation, compensation should be given on a reasonable prorated basis to avoid the impression of coercion. In a multi-part study, compensation can be prorated over the parts of the completed study, and the prorated compensation should be clearly outlined in the informed consent. Even though compensation is calculated on a prorated basis, payment may be made in lump sum at the completion of the volunteer’s participation.

Investigators do not have to compensate individuals who do not participate. For example, an investigator does not have to compensate an individual who comes to the computer lab and leaves before the study is explained or leaves after signing the informed consent, but prior to participating in the research.

As noted above, compensation is for the volunteer’s time spent participating in the research. However, if the advertisement or informed consent document states that volunteers will receive compensation just for "showing up," then all participants must be compensated accordingly.

IACUC Training

As a reminder, all new faculty and investigators and their key personnel need to complete the Veterans Administration online training and associated exam by January 31, 2007. Current faculty members must complete the training and exam by April 30, 2007.

Additional information about the training can be found on the ORA website (www.compliance.iastate.edu) under the IACUC “Training” tab.