topical tests to ensure some amount of comprehension of the material. The students show that they understand specific threats and know which actions the law or codes of conduct require. But this does not address how they would act in a real situation in which the students personally have a great deal at stake. It's useful, but no guarantee of responsible behavior.

Researchers need to keep in mind that unexpected issues and risks can occur at any time, no matter how well prepared we are. An idle question about one's job history can trigger a traumatic story about being harassed or threatened out of a past job. Questions about someone's family might occur on the anniversary of the death of a loved one. And even though the dangers of a health-related study can generally be predicted, the actual stresses and emotional fallout that such research can trigger might be far worse than anticipated. Ready or not, you are on your own out there in the field.

Another concern is that IRB reviews can take a very long time, depending on the staffing and workload of the board. Researchers sometimes need to hit the ground running when an important event occurs, particularly an unexpected one. Yet, the need for review, often requiring multiple revisions, can make real-time research nearly impossible. This reflects the origins of the review process in which the typical and expected research project is a funded government study, often in the medical sciences. The review system does not translate well into every real situation.

IRBs exist in order to protect human subjects, but they often function mostly to protect institutions from lawsuits. For this reason, they sometimes err on the side of caution, almost totally restricting researchers' access to entire populations and rejecting *prima facie* entire modes of research as overly intrusive or inherently risky. That is not their mission. It is important to remember that research does not have to be without risk. Our goal is to identify and manage all of the risks. Excessive caution makes some researchers nostalgic for the days of excessive permissiveness.

One of the frequently talked about, but rarely acknowledged in print, side effects of tight IRB restrictions is that researchers develop strategies for getting around the review process. (I am not going to describe any of those strategies here for what I hope are obvious reasons.) While many people involved in such practices strongly believe that their own expertise is a better guarantee of the safety of their human subjects, and while they perceive some of the review requirements to reflect ignorance or timidity, the fact of researchers getting around the IRB process means that not all research is properly reviewed. And surely there are enough examples of bad research decisions in our fields that we should not want that.

TRYING IT OUT

Suggestion 1

You have been asked to sit on an institutional review board to consider a doctoral student's planned dissertation project. The summary for this research follows:

> My proposed research will involve an observational study of children's classroom behavior, and the effect of praise on student performance. I propose to use sixth-grade students in a local public school. I plan to enter the setting as a student teacher (the teacher of record will be told what my real purpose is). I will then divide the class into two separate groups. One group of children I will frequently compliment and praise for being smart, clever, intelligent, and good students. The other group I will largely ignore, when pressed, comment that they are doing an adequate job. I will collect field notes on how members of each group tend to interact with each other and their teacher. I will additionally collect discrete data (their various exam and essay scores for the class) to see if my use of positive labels affects their class performance.

After reading the foregoing summary of the proposal, answer the following questions:

1. What are some of the important ethical concerns to consider regarding this proposed research project?
2. If you were the researcher, what might you do to respond to the comments made in question 1?
3. What safeguards should the researcher take to protect the subjects in this particular study?