**Group safeguards human welfare**

By Linda Young

The Committee on the Use of Human as Experimental Subjects is probably the strictest "enforcer" at the Institute.

The purpose of this committee is to "safeguard the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in activities supported by grants or contracts from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare."

The policy invoked by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare regarding human use in experimentation is phenomenal in length and detail. With the possibility of revoked grants lurking in the background, MIT adheres to this policy with great precision.

The DHWE stipulates that three conditions be met before projects will be funded. First, the rights and welfare of subjects must be adequately protected. For example, the committee will not allow investigators to introduce "unnecessary or unacceptable hazards." In one student-proposed project, the subject was to have had electric current passed through his body. Dr. Warren Point, Chairman of the Committee on the Use of Humans as Experimental Subjects, was quick to assure The Tech that this project was rejected.

Secondly, the risks to subjects must be outweighed by potential benefits. For the committee, the second condition is a matter of moral judgment. If the subject must suffer to obtain benefits, the committee will reject the project. This agreement requires an "Application for Approval to Use Humans as Experimental Subjects." In this application, the investigator must state the purpose and procedure of experimentation as well as the method for obtaining the informed consent of the subjects. In addition, the researcher must answer numerous questions such as "Will drugs be used?" "Will there be depression?" or "Will the subject suffer humiliation, deception, or invasion of privacy?"

Thirdly, the informed consent of subjects must be obtained by appropriate methods, i.e., not bribery. This third condition creates the most problems for the researchers who must draft a document to be signed by the subjects stating their willingness to participate in the experiment. This agreement must include an unbiased description of the experiment that communicates the risks and benefits, an offer to answer any inquiry concerning the procedures, and the guarantee that the subjects may quit at any time.

When projects involve residents of Boston, as does the study at hand, the committee must review every form submitted by MIT researchers through the committee's "enforcement." It is this "ethical pronouncement," with great precision, that permits or rejects the projects initially, but it also must conduct a continuing review of all ongoing projects. Any change, however minor, in experimental procedure must be reported to the committee.

With the new regulations imposed by the DHWE, the committee's duties are increasing. According to Point, the committee's role is changing from that of reviewer to that of policeman. Although this role is not a pleasant one, it will be done by someone as long as researchers continue to use human subjects.

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