

IV

Managing and Implementing Research with Pediatric and Child Clinical Populations

One of the primary characteristics of research in pediatric and clinical child psychology is that the data are gathered in clinical settings and research often involves complex data sets and research-related collaborations. Consequently, in order to conduct research successfully in these fields investigators need to assume significant organizational and management responsibilities such as securing and managing resources for their research, and hiring and supervising as well as managing staff. Moreover, in order to conduct research in clinical and other applied settings, researchers need to manage a number of troubling logistic problems that can be very difficult to anticipate. These include developing collaborations with agency and hospital staff, recruiting and maintaining research participants, and managing problems in data collection, especially those that threaten the integrity of study design. As one example, randomized controlled clinical trials, which are important vehicles to obtain knowledge about the efficacy of treatment, are difficult to implement and manage. In addition, investigators are increasingly called on to conduct multisite trials in order to enhance the generalizability of their research findings that have been gathered in a single site. However, these multidisciplinary trials are challenging to conduct and require specialized knowledge and methods. Finally, research with children and families in applied clinical settings raises a number of special ethical challenges concerning informed consent, confidentiality, and maintaining the role of researcher that are critical for investigators to anticipate and manage.

To address this need for researchers to obtain information about the practical problems, researchers face in designing and implementing research, the chapters in this section focus on critical aspects of managing research with pediatric and clinical child populations. Each chapter in this section also considers methods of training investigators to become more conversant with the skills and knowledge that are necessary to implement and manage research with children in applied clinical settings.

In Chapter 11, Drotar describes an investigator's eye view of relevant issues in managing research projects including anticipating tasks that are required in different phases of research, developing realistic time estimates for research tasks, working with a research team, recruiting a research team, securing time and space for one's research, managing research budgets and preparing progress reports.

In Chapter 12, Drotar and his colleagues and students consider a wide range of issues that are involved in conducting research in pediatric, school, and child welfare settings, as well as within the child mental health system. They consider strategies to anticipate and manage such key problems such as developing collaborations with staff and negotiating with them to develop and conduct research in different settings, managing communications to colleagues about research, and anticipating and dealing with obstacles to data collection and management in applied settings, including family participation and research. This chapter identifies special dilemmas that are involved in research in different settings and gives concrete examples of successful strategies in implementing research these settings.

Based on combined experience in collaborative multisite research studies, Armstrong and Drotar (Chapter 13) describe strategies and lessons from multi-institutional and multidisciplinary research trials. Using examples of multisite research focused on various populations including childhood cancer, the advantages and problems of different models of multisite collaborative research are described. The benefits of multisite research such as larger sample sizes, increased opportunities for funding and for interdisciplinary learning, coordinated statistical support and data management, and faster dissemination of research findings into practice are considered. The authors also present recommendations to anticipate and manage predictable problems in multisite studies such as maintaining standardized data collection and quality control compliance with protocols at different sites, investigator change, and difficulties in decision making. Finally, Armstrong and Drotar present models to train students to learn about and conduct multisite collaborative research.

Research with clinical child and pediatric populations raises a number of difficult ethical issues that have not been widely disseminated. In Chapter 14, Drotar, Overholser, and their students and colleagues consider a wide range of difficult ethical issues that can arise in conducting research with pediatric and clinical child populations in a range of settings. These issues include working with groups that are charged with the oversight of research ethics in specific situations, problems related to confidentiality of data, obtaining appropriate consent, managing risks related to psychological vulnerability, and maintaining appropriate role boundaries as researchers in clinical settings. Using specific illustrations from research with various populations of children and families this chapter presents a range of concrete suggestions to help researchers anticipate and prevent difficult ethical problems in conducting their research.

Each chapter in this section makes recommendations for new methods of training investigators to become more equipped with the skills and knowledge that are necessary to implement and manage research with children in applied clinical settings, for example, training in research in the context of participating in large-scale clinical trials, experiences in supervising and managing research conducted by others, and training from experienced investigators who are role models for teaching about how they manage practical problems that have emerged in their research.