

*Deception* in human subjects research means deliberately misleading subjects about the nature of a study. *Concealment* means deliberately withholding certain information.

Since in some instances full disclosure to subjects of the actual study design may influence subjects' responses, a researcher may choose to deceive subjects or to conceal information about a study's purpose, a researcher's role, or exactly which procedures are experimental. While deception and concealment can be necessary in certain kinds of research, they also present special ethical concerns, especially regarding subjects' ability to provide informed consent.

Researchers and IRBs must make sure that any study involving deception or concealment meets all criteria for a waiver or alteration of informed consent. This means the study must pose no more than minimal risk to its subjects, and the waiver or alteration must not adversely affect subjects' rights and welfare. The particular nature of the study must necessitate use of deception or concealment and, therefore, the waiver or alteration of consent.

Usually, a researcher using deception or concealment is required to debrief subjects immediately following their participation. This means explaining the true and complete nature of the study and allowing subjects then to decide whether the researcher may use their data. In certain circumstances, IRBs may give researchers permission to wait until they have collected all study data before debriefing their subjects. In these cases, researchers must make sure that subjects do not face undue stress or embarrassment, and must debrief subjects as soon as data collection is complete.

Contact the IRB for more information about deception and concealment in human subjects research.

*Posted: 5/16/2012*