PO-13

How can principles of research integrity be used to promote an open and constructive debate in the aftermath of research projects gone wrong?

Anna Holmesland, Maria Sandhaug Sandhaug, Camilla Bø Iversen

The National Research Ethics Committees, Norway

Can principles of research integrity be used as a tool to ensure safe, open, fair and honest discissions within research communities when a research project has gone wrong? We would like to present a poster, inviting participants of the ENRIO 2025 Congress to debate and exchange experiences.

We will link our discussion to a Norwegian research project on colon cancer. The project was approved by a regional research ethics committee in Norway, in accordance with the Norwegian Health Research Act and the Declaration of Helsinki, but terminated prematurely due to severe irregularities. The police fined the responsible institutions, and the Norwegian Board of Health Supervision demanded research data to be deleted and not published. Regional ethics committees argued that deleting research data, and hindering publications of negative scientific results, was unethical towards the participants, and not beneficial to society in general.

When the authorities have been involved in handling cases like the above example, what room is left for the research communities to discuss ethical dilemmas associated with the sanctions imposed? Furthermore, if accusations are made against individual researchers who might have acted in good faith, or administrative reactions are imposed against a research group or a research institution, consequences may be that an open and constructive assessment of past events is in fact hindered. In worst case researchers might avoid entering into new projects. This might hinder publications of new scientific knowledge.

By presenting our thoughts and questions at the ENRIO 2025 Congress, we encourage other participants to share experiences they might have with similar cases. We aim for a joint reflection on how principles of research integrity may be used to promote fruitful discussions after irregularities in research projects have been uncovered. The goal must be to prevent similar situations in the future.