

Descriptive analysis of registered COVID-19 research and the approval timeline in the National Medical Research Register (NMRR) from 2020-2023

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: To address the immediate public health crisis during COVID-19, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Independent Ethics Committee (IEC) are giving priority to expediting and reviewing COVID-19-related research. **Methods:** This is an observational, cross-sectional study on COVID-19-related research from January 2020 to June 2023 registered in the National Medical Research Register (NMRR). **Results:** Over that period, NMRR has registered 1416 COVID-19-related research with 97% being Investigator-Initiated Research (IIR) and 3% being Industrial Sponsored Research (ISR). It started in 2020 with 422 research registered and peaked in 2021 with 510 research. In 2022, the numbers decreased, reaching 389 research and only 95 research up to June 2023. The majority of registered studies were observational (84.6%), followed by Interventional (3.8%) with clinical audit (0.4%) being the least. In terms of the submission's purposes, 90.5% were seeking registration and MREC approval, while 9.5% were for registration only. Out of 1282, 1015 research have received final decisions whereby 66% have been approved via Expedited Review by Chairperson, 24.6% via Primary Reviewers, and 3.7% via MREC full board. Meanwhile, 4.4% of the research was exempted and 1.3% of the research was disapproved. The average approval review timeline per number of research in 2020 (6 days/276), 2021 (13 days /357), 2022 (11 days / 286) and 2023 (15 days /95) respectively. **Conclusion:** In a nutshell, with the increased number of research, the approval review timeline has been expedited for the benefit of all in managing and understanding COVID-19.