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Unser Zeichen:
Dok.:

4. März 2016

Opinion of the Ethics Council of the Max Planck Society on the "SHARE" Project

The SHARE project has been running since 2002. It was originally established at the Mannheim Research Institute for the Economics of Aging (MEA) of the University of Mannheim. Since 2011, it is being operated under the umbrella of the Max Planck Society at the Max Planck Institute for Social Law and Social Policy and is centrally coordinated by the Munich Center for the Economics of Aging. As a result, the research-ethical assessments of the project, which were previously carried out by the University of Mannheim (see ethics committee decisions dated 13.12.2004, 16.12.2008 and 28.6.2010), were taken over by the Ethics Council of the Max Planck Society. The Council first dealt with parts of the project at its meeting on 19.10.2011 – not conclusively – and later at its meetings on 15.2.2012, 13.6.2012, 19.2.2014, and 23.2.2016 (Waves 4-7) in detail. In the process, the overall concept with its interdisciplinary and international approach was also scrutinized in an appropriate scope. The Ethics Council came to the unanimous conclusion that the overall project design as well as the subprojects it assessed – e.g., the SHARELIFE questionnaire or the sampling and analysis of dried blood spots since Wave 4 – did not raise any research-ethical concerns as regards design and foreseen practical implementation. Upon recommendation of the Ethics Council, data protection concerns were clarified with the Data Protection Officer of the Max Planck Society.

Numerous approvals and votes by other ethics committees in the participating SHARE countries – in particular, with regard to the international sampling and analysis of dried blood spots in Wave 6 – have confirmed the project to be compliant with relevant legal, especially statutory norms, as well as with research-ethical guidelines, e.g., the set of ethical principles regarding human experimentation developed for the medical community by the World Medical Association (Declaration of Helsinki, last revised at the 64th WMA Meeting held in Fortaleza/Brazil in October 2013).

The Ethics Council of the Max Planck Society extends its best wishes to the persons responsible for the continued success of the project.

Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Wolfrum

Chairman of the Max Planck Society Ethics Council