The Ethics of Health Research Between Biomedicine and Anthropology

University of Bern
27 March 2026

Organized by **Medical Anthropology Switzerland (MAS)**
& **Ethical and Deontological Think Tank (EDTT)**
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The Swiss Human Research Act (HRA) lays the legal basis regulating research done in the health domain. As such it has important implications for anthropological research studying health and biomedicine, its institutions, practices, and experiences. One of the key issues relates to the ambiguity of medical / health anthropological research as entering (or not) in the scope of the HRA, with the subsequent necessity (or not) to apply for approval from cantonal ethical commissions. This creates tensions between institutionalized and processual ethics (Perrin et al. 2018). It raises also fundamental and practical questions for anthropology and related social sciences, and shapes interdisciplinary collaborations and dialogue.

As the Human Research Act applies to "health-related-data", what are the different understandings at stake when defining them? What are the scope and boundaries of "health"? Is ethical approval from cantonal commissions only needed for "patients" or also for professionals? What are then the various implications between involving patients, citizen, or health professionals? In order to reflect on the challenges and issues raised by the institutional and biomedical framing of "ethics" of health research for the anthropology of health and medicine, and allied social sciences, the Commissions Ethical and Deontological Think Tank (EDTT) and Medical Anthropology Switzerland (MAS) organize a one-day workshop on **March 27, 2026**. It will take place at the **University of Bern, Hauptgebäude, Kuppelraum, 104, 117, 217**.

The workshop is participatory. It builds on several previous workshops and publications discussing the ethics of qualitative research. The goal is to advance dialogue between institutional representatives of the ethics of research and the community of researchers in the social sciences of health and medicine. As the HRA is under revision, the goal is also to identify the relevant changes that could be made and explore collaboratively how to implement them.

Burton-Jeangros, Claudine, éd. 2017. L'éthique (en) pratique: la recherche en sciences sociales. Université de Genève.

Perrin, Julie, Nolwenn Bühler, Marc-Antoine Berthod, Jérémie Forney, Sabine Kradolfer, et Laurence Ossipow. 2018. « Searching for Ethics: Legal Requirements and Empirical Issues for Anthropology ». Swiss Journal of Sociocultural Anthropology 23:138-53. doi:10.36950/tsantsa.2018.23.7316.

Roca Escoda, Marta, Claudine Burton-Jeangros, Pablo Diaz Almudever, et Ilario Rossi. 2020. Enjeux éthiques dans l'enquête en sciences sociales. Université de Genève.

PROGRAM

09:00	Welcome and Introductory Words
09:15	Ethics and Politics in Anthropology
09:30	Presentation of the Survey Results
10:15	Beyond Switzerland. Examples from other European countries
10:30	*Coffee Break*
11:00	Round Table. The Challenges of Evaluating Qualitative Research: Perspectives from Institutional Representatives of Research Ethics
12:30	*Lunch Break*
13:30	World Café. Discussing Changes in Practice
15:30	Closing Remarks

REGISTRATION
Participation if free, but registration is mandatory,
please **register by clicking here**.

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Medical Anthropology Switzerland (MAS)
Ethical and Deontological Think Tank (EDTT)

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