

Ethical relationships: At the core of a centripetal approach to knowledge development

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Ethics. The gap between a ring-fenced view of ethics as provision of the 'right' answers to a standard set of questions on an Ethics Committee form, and ethics as an ongoing, everyday, challenge with enormous emotional and theoretical implications, was brought into sharp focus for me across the three days of the Ninth Global Forum on Bioethics and Research.

Looking back through my notes, I am struck again by Mason Durie's call on the first day of the Forum for a centrifugal focus to knowledge as opposed to a centripetal one. A flowing up and outwards, rather than a closing down. For Durie, this switch was part of a broader switch required to shift researcher attitudes and indigenise research. He also highlighted a desired shift from 'consultation' to 'relationship' – and for me this was the issue that resonated throughout the three days. The need for, and the multiple challenges in, building ongoing, ethical, relationships built on mutual understanding and genuine communication, in which the human(e) remains central.

Maui Hudson was gently challenged by fellow Māori, who saw potential for cooption and re-colonisation when he spoke of 'negotiating ethical spaces' in which Māori and non-Māori could 'negotiate purposefully ... exchange concepts and ideas, and thus develop new insights and relationships with knowledge'. This demonstrates the constant difficulty of achieving ethical relationships while still being able to acknowledge histories of endemic, abusive systems of control and of frequently abusive interpersonal relationships.