The Effect of Seed Grants on Surgical Ethics Education and Research
Shuddhadeb Ray, MD, Ahmed M Zihni, MD, Jason D Keune, MD, Mary E Klingensmith, MD, FACS, Douglas Brown, PhD, Ira J Kodner, MD, FACS
Washington University, St. Louis School of Medicine, St. Louis, MO

INTRODUCTION: Ethics education and research are playing an expanding role in surgical training. From 2008-2011, seed grants were provided to attending physicians, fellows, and residents from various institutions to carry out ethics projects. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effect of seed grants on recipients and their ethics projects and identify challenges they encountered.

METHODS: Two anonymous internet surveys were sent to grant recipients, one immediately following the grant period in 2011 focusing on immediate feedback about the grant, and one in 2014 focusing on accomplishments and challenges after the grant period. Responses were tabulated and common themes were identified.

RESULTS: The response rates of the 2011 and 2014 surveys were 25/40 (62.5%), and 23/40 (57.5%, still active), respectively. The majority of responders were Attending Physicians (18/23, 60.9%); residents and fellows also submitted responses. Grants were identified as beneficial to beginning or expanding institutional ethics training programs by all respondents, and most found the grant beneficial to their career development (19/23, 86.4%). The majority of grants were used to develop ethics curricula for students or housestaff (18/23, 81.8%), though many also pursued ethics research (10/23, 45.5%). A minority of respondents (3/23, 13.6%) received further funding for ethics research or education following their grant. Challenges described include lack of interest from other faculty and difficulty continuing programs due to funding.

CONCLUSIONS: Seed grants are beneficial to developing surgical ethics education curricula, advancing careers in ethics education, and promoting ethics research. Ongoing funding for ethics education remains a challenge for surgical educators.