



## *How do you store your data once the study is completed?*

### **What do you need to store and for how long?**

Your data (electronic and hardcopy), data sharing agreement and your regulatory file need to be stored. The question is for how long? The rules state that all research documents must be stored for 15 years.

#### **Data:**

Apart from your regular data back-ups you have to store your final database. Ensure that you know which one was your final database. One of the worst things that can happen is that you submit your article for publication, the reviewers send some remarks and you have to look at your data again and you cannot remember which database was the final one. This can lead to hours of extra and unnecessary work and a lot of frustration

#### **Paper documents:**

The following must be stored safely and for 15 years:

- All research data, including the CRFs, questionnaires and consent forms.
- Regulatory file (example of index Appendix 6).
- Data sharing agreement or MOU with other colleagues (example Data Sharing Agreement Appendix 6).

All paper documents must be kept for 15 years. Long term storage requires a lock-up facility which is preferably safe from natural disasters like floods, fire and other destructive elements, for example rats and moths. As a further precautionary mechanism against water damage from burst water pipes or floods, never store data directly on the floor, always store it on shelves.

Data and documents should be stored in a logical format for later retrieval e.g. by community or by date or by unique identifier. The consent forms and the linking lists which contain names should always be stored in a separate locked filing cabinet.

## How not to store your data!!!!

Do you recognise Prof Gie sweeping the floor after a flood on 2nd floor one Friday afternoon in 2009? Data forms stored on the floor were water-boarded and destroyed!



The Department of Paediatrics and Child Health has a cabinet for the secure storage of research data and forms.

## Requirements on completion of the research study

After the final report is submitted to the Ethics Committee, and your study published, all documentation must be stored for a minimum period of 15 years. This should be stored in the department where you did your research and are enrolled as a postgraduate student. You and your supervisor will have to ensure that the necessary space is allocated and that your data is retrievable if necessary in the next 15 years.

## How do you dispose of your data after the required storage time?

You have to ensure that you inform the custodian of the storage facility when the data should be destroyed. You have to do it yourself or need to proactively arrange for this to take place in a confidential manner by the custodian. A good memorandum of understanding (MOU) should be in place when the data is stored for the first time. A good idea is to clearly indicate the following on the storage box:

- Name of study
- Name of investigator and mentor
- Funded by
- Type of documents
- Do not destroy before 2029 (or the date 15 years after completion)
- Additional information

Gie, R., & Beyers, N. (2014). Getting started in clinical research: Guidance for junior researchers. Cape Town: Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Stellenbosch University.