



Ministry of Health and Sports

Public Health Ethics: Key Principles

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Presentation Outline

- What is public health ethics?
- The contribution of ethics to public health
- Key issues in public health ethics
- Ethical considerations in public health response to pandemics



What is Public Health Ethics?

- **Public health ethics** involves a systematic process to clarify, prioritize and justify possible courses of **"PUBLIC HEALTH ACTION"** based on *ethical principles, values and beliefs* of stakeholders, and scientific and other *information*.

It is a deliberation of **MORAL NORMS** that should guide public health decision-making.



Contrast to Traditional Bio-Ethics

Traditional emphasis of bioethicists is on the *physician–patient relationship*, while **public-health ethics** focuses on the design and implementation of measures to monitor and *improve the health of populations*.



Clinical Ethics vs. Public Health Ethics

Clinical Ethics	Public Health Ethics
Focus on <i>individual patient-provider</i> interactions	Focus on populations, institutions, communities
Individual liberty, autonomy	Interdependence of people
Authority vested in prestige of medical profession	Authority vested in the police powers of states
Patient consent	Societal consent & public engagement
Beneficence and non-maleficence	Social good & avoiding social harm
Justice	Social justice and equity



The Contribution of Ethics to Public Health

Public-health ethics looks beyond health care to consider the *structural conditions* that promote or inhibit the development of healthy societies.

Governance

Regulations

Guidelines

Citizen's
Rights



Concepts of Public Health Ethics

Common Good

Equity

Reciprocity

Solidarity

Population
Well-Being



Public Health Ethical Issues

- Responsibility to protect society
- Responsibility to the individual
- Individual vs. community rights
- Government responsibility
- Corporate social responsibility
- Right to health care
- Personal responsibility - *self care*
- Quality of care
- Freedom of choice
- Acting on evidence vs. not acting



- ❑ Legal enforcement of helmets and seat belts ?**
- ❑ Do national immunization days and mass drug administration campaigns violate the principle of autonomy?**



Six Key Principles of PH Ethics

1. Disparities in health status, access to health care and to the benefits of medical research
2. Responding to the threat of infectious diseases
3. International cooperation in health monitoring and surveillance
4. Exploitation of individuals in low-income countries
5. Health Promotion
6. Participation, transparency, and accountability



Disparities in health status, access to health care and to the benefits of medical research

Questions about **resource allocation** depend in part on value judgments about the relative importance of *small improvements in quality of life for a large portion* of the population as compared with a *life-saving intervention* that would benefit only a few people.



Responding to the threat of infectious diseases

Efforts to contain the spread of infectious diseases raise difficult questions about the appropriateness of restricting individual choices to safeguard other people's welfare.

***Examples** include the use of isolation and quarantine for tuberculosis, pandemic influenza, COVID-19 disease*



International cooperation in health monitoring and surveillance

- ❖ The implementation of the International Health Regulations reflects the commitment of countries to collective action in the face of public-health emergencies.
- ❖ Defining the scope of countries' obligations to act collectively, and determining how those obligations should be enforced, will inevitably raise difficult ethical dilemmas.



Exploitation of individuals in low-income countries

- ❖ Current practices in medical research, for example, may expose participants to significant risks without a benefit for themselves or their communities.
- ❖ Defining and enforcing *foreign research sponsors' obligations* to local participants is therefore a critical ethical issue.
- ❖ In the area of organ transplantation, the growing practice of *“transplant tourism”* exposes individuals living in poverty to significant health risks while also raising broader questions about the commodification of the human body.



Health Promotion

The growing public-health threats of noncommunicable diseases, including those caused in part by *unhealthy behaviours* such as smoking, poor diet or lack of exercise, have raised the question of the extent to which public-health authorities should **interfere with personal choices on health**.



Participation, transparency, and accountability

As an ethical matter, the process by which decisions are made is as important as the outcome of the decisions.

In the area of medical research, much attention has been devoted in recent years to *strengthening systems for informed consent and community oversight*.

Once such systems are in place, the next step will be to develop mechanisms for evaluating their effectiveness.



Common Ethical Challenges in Public Health Practice

- Allocating scarce resources fairly: in regard to undocumented aliens, in emergencies, etc.
- Respecting individual rights and freedom while protecting the public good
- Protecting underserved and marginalized populations and building trust with them
- Engaging and sharing information with communities in a transparent manner
- Protecting data confidentiality and individual privacy while conducting surveillance activities



Ethical considerations in public health response to pandemics

- Priority setting and equitable access to therapeutic and prophylactic measures
- Isolation, quarantine, border control and social-distancing measures
- The role and obligations of health-care workers during an outbreak
- Developing a multilateral response to an outbreak
- Research during Pandemics



Public Health Research During Pandemics: Ethical Concerns

1. The need to *generate new knowledge* that may optimize the response to the current pandemic or improve future pandemic preparedness and response with efforts employed to actually respond to the current pandemic.
2. Studies must be scientifically valid, add social value, and *risks must be reasonable in relation to anticipated benefits.*
3. Given the often urgent nature and acute timeline of pandemics, *research ethics review boards may need to modify their standard operating procedures* in order to respond to time-sensitive research proposals. **[EXPEDITED REVIEWS]**



Public Health Research during pandemics: Ethical Concerns (*contd.*)

4. Involving local researchers in international research collaborations also contributes to building *long-term research capacity* in affected countries and promoting the value of international equity in science.

5. Scientific journals should facilitate this process by allowing researchers to *publish data with immediate implications for public health* .



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Questions, Comments and Suggestions



Thank You

