COVID-19: Public Health Ethical Guidance for Nurses

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PROVIDER/DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe responsibilities and priorities of individual, institutional, and societal realms of ethics.

2. Identify differences in ethical analysis in standard clinical decisions and public health decisions.

3. Explore principles such as justice and beneficence to determine how to balance public health goods.
All healthcare professionals engage in ethical decision making on a daily basis. The tools that one uses to make ethical decisions in a public health crisis are different than those used in routine care.

Nurses, especially those who are in leadership roles, should be able to recognize ethical issues, use statements from professional associations to guide judgments, think critically and systematically through ethical problems using tools of ethical analysis, and provide reasoned, articulate judgments to those involved.
Matching Tools to Arenas of Responsibility

- A thoughtful ethical discussion includes recognition of individuals within institutions of various types that exist within the larger society.
- Tools, priorities and timelines will differ.
- At the same time, we need to recognize interrelationships and interdependencies that exist within the individual, institutional and societal realms.
Glaser Model – Three Realms of Ethical Complexity

Social Level

Institutional Level

Individual Level

Concerns individuals and their relationships; weighs and balances the goods that stand in tension between two or more individuals.

Glaser Model – Three Realms of Ethical Complexity

The institutional level’s primary objective is net institutional good and the good of individuals within the organization and the common good.
Ethical Concerns of Institutions

- Are broader than and stretch beyond the practice of clinical care
- Apply to the individuals who comprise it, i.e., patients, families, employees including health professionals, technicians and other service providers, volunteers, administration and trustees
- Apply to the larger society in which it exists
The societal realm deals with the common good – the overall and long-term goodness of a society – nation, state, city. It attends to the health, balance and equity of society’s key systems and structures.
Ethical Priorities

**Individual**
- Respect for individual autonomy
- Maximize benefit to each of your patients
- Fidelity/allegiance to each patient
- Not all who could benefit receive treatment (due to lack of access/insurance)

**Societal**
- Respect for common good, not individual autonomy
- Less autonomy for practitioners
- Maximize benefit to the greatest number of people
- Allocate scarce resources responsibly and transparently
- Not all who could benefit receive treatment (due to scarcity)
Public Health Ethics Considerations for COVID-19

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Disclaimer

The findings and conclusions in this presentation are those of the presenter and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
Public Health Ethics and COVID-19

- Transitioning to a public health perspective
- Interdependence, solidarity, relational autonomy
- Avoiding stigmatizing of individuals and groups
- Liberty limiting measures to protect public
- Allocating scarce resources: testing and ventilators
- Here we focus on approaches to allocation
Allocation Methods for Scarce Resources

- Equal dignity: avoid discrimination and favoritism
- Equal chance: lottery, first-come, first-served
- Prioritizing worse-off: sickest, vulnerable, older
- Utilitarianism: maximizing benefits, most lives saved
- Promoting social usefulness: instrumental value, reciprocity
- Combination strategy may provide best approach
Achieving Equity in Allocation

- Equity involves fair distribution of resources
- Differs from a mathematically equal distribution
- Proportional in relation to need and supply
- Fairly distributes burdens and benefits among groups
- Equity can conflict with utility and efficiency
- Advance guidance and community input critical
Promoting Social Usefulness and Instrumental Value

- Prioritizing COVID-19 testing
  - Health care workers and first responders
  - Any worker who frequently interacts with the public?

- Prioritizing ventilators for health care workers?
  - Can they recover in time to assist response?
  - Reciprocity: recompensing someone for their service
  - Do we owe people for fulfilling professional duty?
  - Boosting morale and encouraging more to volunteer
Uniqueness of COVID-19

- Novel and unknown features of the virus itself
- Exposing flaws in health care system
- Exposing gaps in social safety net
- Exacerbating political divisions but also evoking solidarity
- Covid-19 rallying global innovative research endeavors
- Severe pandemic causing global economic disruption
Allocation of Ventilators

Ethical Considerations for Decision Making Regarding Allocation of Mechanical Ventilators during a Severe Influenza Pandemic or Other Public Health Emergency

This document, Ethical Considerations for Decision Making Regarding Allocation of Mechanical Ventilators during a Severe Influenza Pandemic or Other Public Health Emergency, provides ethical considerations that the Ethics Subcommittee of the Advisory Committee to the Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) proposes to aid in the decision making specific to allocation of mechanical ventilators during a severe influenza pandemic. The intent of this document is to provide decision makers at all levels—federal, tribal, territorial, state, and local—with an overview of the complex ethical landscape associated with decision making about allocation of scarce life-sustaining healthcare resources. This document is

- https://www.cdc.gov/os/integrity/phethics/ESdocuments.htm
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Ethics Resources on the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

https://www.thehastingscenter.org/ethics-resources-on-the-coronavirus/