

# COVID-19: Ethical considerations during a public health disaster

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# Outline

- Defining Public Health
- Public health ethics
- Ethical principles and the pandemic
- Duties for health leaders
- Roles and duties of patients, health care workers, authorities and the society
- Conclusion

# Public Health

The science of protecting the safety and improving the health of communities through education, policy making and research for disease and injury prevention.

Grew from epidemic response

[www.publichealth.pitt.edu](http://www.publichealth.pitt.edu)



# The goals of public health

Assuring an adequate local public health infrastructure

Promoting healthy communities and healthy behaviours

Preventing the spread of communicable disease

Protecting against environmental health hazards

Preparing for and responding to emergencies

Assuring health services

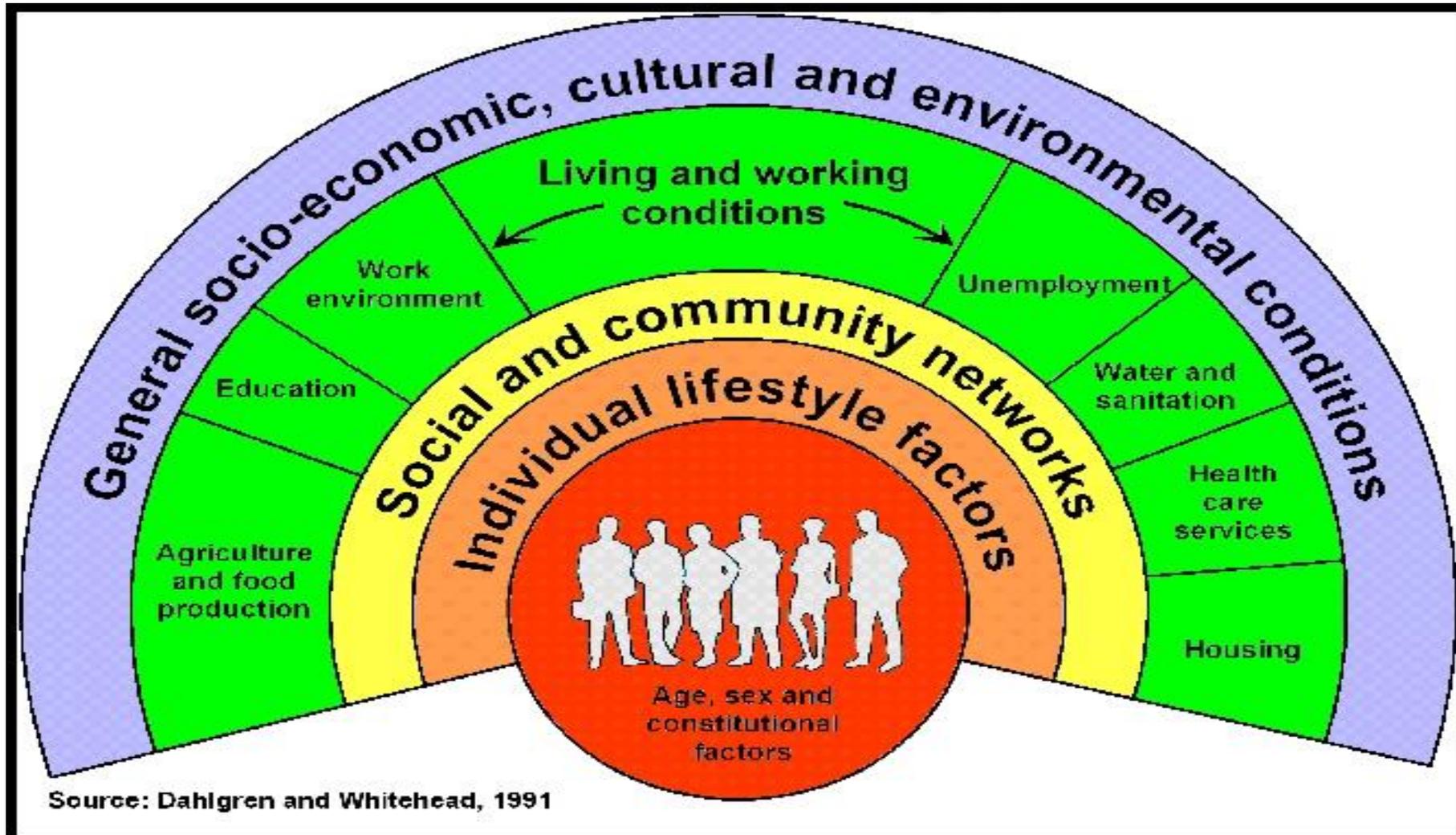
Research



# Public health response to epidemics

- Clean and safe water system
- Sewer systems
- Regulations of restaurants and workplaces
- Dumping of dangerous materials
- Reporting of infectious diseases
  - Isolation
  - Surveillance
  - Treatment
  - Contact tracing

# Social determinants of health and Covid-19: A moral crisis



# Moral crisis

 Eyewitness News

## 'We still have schools without water': Unions urge dept to close schools

FILE: Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga. Picture: Christa Eybers/EWN. Coronavirus · Covid 19 · SADTU · Naptosa · Coronavirus ...

 News24

## Think BIG - Basic income grant needs to be about more than just food, say researchers

Social Development Minister Lindiwe Zulu announced government was considering the introduction of a basic income grant. Another expert ...

1 day ago



 News24

## WATCH | 'We can't wash our hands' - Makhanda residents have no water for Covid-19 fight

... our hands' - Makhanda residents have no water for Covid-19 fight ... community members of the Hlalani informal settlement in Makhanda in ...

3 weeks ago



 BizNews

## Yawning gap between rich and poor in SA has expanded in Covid-19 era – study

Race affected the inequalities in two ways: Africans were more likely ... Black people are among the worst affected by the Covid-19 epidemic in South Africa. ... it also widens the health disparity between the rich and the

2 weeks ago



 BusinessTech

## South Africa's GDP tanks 51% in the second quarter

... in the second quarter of the year, reflecting the immense damage done to the economy by the Covid-19 lockdown. This pushes South Africa ...

3 hours ago



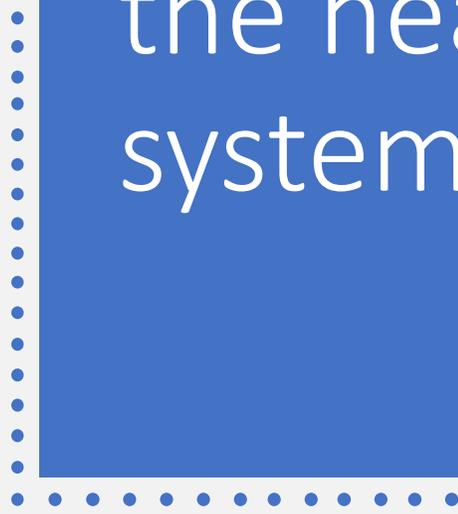
# Public health disaster and ethics





## Characteristics of a pandemic

- Uncertainty
- Changing circumstances
- Rapidly changing recommendations
- Planning and resource allocation



# Public health disaster and the health system

- Disrupts health systems and services
- Consumes resources set aside for routine care
- Limitations on individual rights and preferences
- Restricted access – space, medication & supplies assignment, equipment and e
- Reassignment of human resources
- Delayed care
- Employs disaster-based protocols (triage) – last resort
- Threatened human resource capacity

# The shift from Clinical to Pandemic ethics

## Clinical ethics

- Autonomy
- Non- maleficence
- Beneficence
- Justice



## Public health ethics

- Interdependence
- Community trust – communication, transparency, confidentiality, cultural appropriateness, etc.
- Fundamentality
- Justice





## The Bill of Rights and access to care

- Basic human right – **access** to health care
- Actual **receipt** of care i.e. admission to hospital vs. actual receipt required care
- The **right** to emergency medical treatment
- **Rationing (triage)** of care i.e. Who gets the ventilator?



# Ethical principles

- Justice
- Beneficence
- Utility
- Respect for persons
- Liberty
- Solidarity
- Reciprocity
- Trust



Covid-19: Health minister calls for volunteers

Apr 9, 2020



Zondo says PPE corruption reports are 'frightening', laments lack of corruption prosecutions

Deputy Chief Justice Raymond Zondo has raised concerns about PPE corruption tenders. He says the corruption continues to happen, and " ...

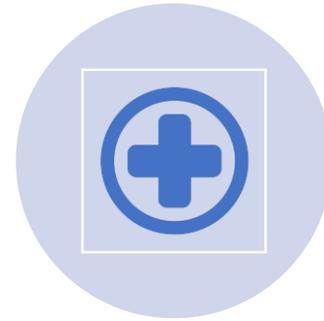
3 days ago



# Privacy during a pandemic



Relevant to achieve legitimate and necessary public health goals.



If there are no less intrusive means to protect public health



Benefits outweigh harm



Provide public education



# International Health Regulations

Require countries to exercise their health powers in a **transparent** and **non-discriminatory** manner with full **respect** for the dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons.

World Health Organization (2005)

# Covid-19 ethical dilemmas



- Restriction on freedom of movement
- Individual's refusal of preventive or therapeutic interventions
- Health care workers' rights and duty to care
- The allocation of scarce resources
- Off - label use of diagnostic and therapeutic measures
- Research

# Ethics consultations /committees



**H** Health.com

## If Coronavirus Patients Outnumber Ventilators, Who Gets One? Here's How Doctors Decide

What do existing guidelines tell us about how doctors and nurses are likely to allocate scarce resources in the face of a pandemic? By Patti ...



# Justifying Public Health Interventions



Effectiveness

Proportionality

Necessity or essentiality

Least infringement

Public justification

# Allocation of scarce resources

Sickest first

Most likely to benefit

First-come-first serve

Random allocation / lottery

Ability to pay

Who are the likely to benefit?



# Three Duties for Health Care Leaders

# Duty to Plan

## *Managing Uncertainty*

- Plan for ethical challenges – protocols and guidelines
- How to “do the right thing” in clinical practice when duties or values conflict?
- Contingency planning
- Resource availability and allocation

# Duty to safeguard

## *Supporting Workers and Protecting Vulnerable Populations*

- Safe work environment
- Reduce the risk of occupational harm
- Protect vulnerable populations – disabled, comorbid, elderly, etc.

# Duty to guide

## *Contingency Levels of Care and Crisis Standards of Care*

- Resource scarcity
- Futility
- Clinical ethics consultations
- Public health ethics - equality vs. equity





Roles and responsibilities of individuals, health workers, authorities and society



## Duties of health workers

- Moral obligations
  - Humanity
  - No blame
- Professional obligations
- Duty of care
- Uphold social contract
- Uphold employment contract

# Obligation of individuals



Seek diagnosis  
and treatment



Finish the  
treatment  
course



Prevent spread  
of the disease

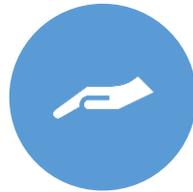


Tell the truth

# Obligations to workers



Provide tools  
and protocols



Protection  
(safety)



Support

# The impact of a pandemic on health professionals



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- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Depression
- Burnout
- Moral distress

# Obligations to the society



Imperatives  
for  
compliance



Awareness of  
reasons for  
public health  
measures



Benefits of  
compliance  
and risks of  
non-  
compliance



Mechanism to  
review  
decision as  
the public  
health  
situation  
change



Address  
stakeholder  
complaints

# Conclusion

- Public health emergencies call for focus on population health / outcomes
- Individual rights may get subordinated and it must be justifiable
- Protect vulnerable people
- Ethics consultations facilitates procedural fairness and, prevents moral harm and unintended outcomes
- Prepare for adverse effects secondary to the pandemic response
- Focus is on greater good whilst minimizing harm to individuals