

# Ethical Challenges in Occupational Health: the COVID Pandemic

---

SOME THOUGHTS

IT IS NOT BLACK AND WHITE!

FH Fox ACPHM(SA)OccMed, FFOM(UK), FFOM(I)

# Ethical Principles

---

Autonomy

Beneficence

Non-Maleficence

Distributive justice

# Application in Health

---

National

Regional/ industry

Site

Individual

Public health measures vs treatment

# Challenges

---

Public good vs individual

Legal vs ethical

Fast- moving, Dynamic situation

Erratic, inconsistent, sometimes incoherent, approach from government

- Lockdown rules about shopping!

Slow government response (vaccines)

- Purchasing, licensing, authorisation of clinics etc

Poor communication from authorities

# In Practice

---

Isolation/ exclusion/ quarantine

Contact tracing

Mandatory Testing

- Shortage of tests
- Test method (PCR and Rapid Ag)

Vulnerable people

Mandatory PPE

- To mask or not?

Non-evidence-based interventions and remedies

Phases of the pandemic

Growth of scientific knowledge

- Infectious period as it related to quarantine and return to work

Fake news/ antivacc etc

Mandatory vaccination

Shortages: tests, PPE, vaccines

# Lessons

---

Ethical principles are guidance and are alive

- No one principal is more important than the other

They are situational

- There is rarely a clear-cut answer

You may have to pick some that will exceed the value of others

Decisions may have to be revisited

Equity is important

Making local decisions requires processes not just rules i.e. flexibility to consider the situation, not rigid application of a rule

# The Pandemic Progression

Phase	Knowledge	Disease	Response	Ethics focus in OH
Early	little	Severe	Reactive	Public health
Middle	growing	Severe but declining	Proactive - preventive	Public health
Late - end	Broad understanding	Mostly mild, still severe for those at risk	Focus on vaccines, relaxation of controls	Public health with shift towards individual
Endemic disease	Growing understanding	Majority mild but still a significant cause of death and morbidity in the vulnerable	Watching	Public health less important

# Suggested reading

---

Covid-19 and mandatory vaccination: Ethical considerations.

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Policy-brief-Mandatory-vaccination-2022.1>

What Covid has taught the world about ethics.

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2210173>

Ethical Issues in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. Raus K, Mortier E, Eeckloo K.

[Bioethics](#). 2021 Jul; 35(6): 581–588.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8239940/>