

Public Health Ethics

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New insights



Bioethics- Key Principles

- Autonomy**
- Beneficence**
- Non-maleficence**
- Justice**

Public Health Ethics



- ❑ The relation of Public Health to the set of moral principles is very complex
- ❑ Some moral principles support the pursuits in Public Health
- ❑ Some limit or constrain the public health actions

Public Health Programmes.....

- In India, members of one community come out with a statement that none of its members will consume Diethyl Carbamazine (DEC) tablets distributed to prevent Lymphatic Filariasis under MDA programme**

Public Health Programmes.....

- Another religious group refused to administer Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) to their children on National Immunization Day (NID) under Intensified Pulse Polio Immunization activities**

Public Health Programmes.....

- Mr. A, with sputum positive Pulmonary Tuberculosis refuses to take medication because the health worker insists to administer the drug under direct observation in the DOTS programme of Revised National Tuberculosis Control Programme (RNTCP)**

Public Health Interventions

- **Two wheeler riders stage a protest against the Government's legal enforcement of helmets, as they feel that wearing helmets leads to loss of hair, various minor ailments and other inconveniences.**

Public Health Programmes.....

- **One democratic government proposes to popularize genetic screening to detect carriers of genetic diseases with a view to discouraging them from reproducing so that the incidence of such diseases could be brought down.**

Public Health Interventions....

- **Routine mandatory screening of newborns for Cystic Fibrosis will help to identify affected children earlier and improve their treatment prospects**

What's that again?

- **An Ayurvedic physician in Kerala approaches the court to stop the Government from conducting MDA against Lymphatic Filariasis, as adverse reactions had been described for the drug in standard text books.**

What's that again?

- **Cotrimoxazole, a drug used in Acute Respiratory Infection Control Programme can sometimes lead to Steven Johnson's Syndrome and fatal outcomes**

Dilemma!!!

- **One Government decides to spend 40% of its total budget for drugs to purchase a new drug for the treatment of breast cancer which is going to benefit about 100 women with advanced breast cancer every year**

Dilemma!!!

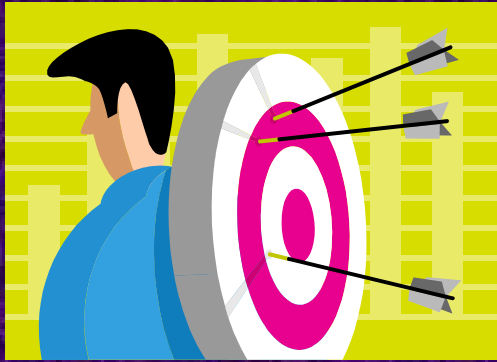
- **One parent in Canada approaches the court for a second Bone marrow transplant for his child as the Government has refused to pay for the same**

? Rights

- **Government of Kerala has introduced prohibition of liquor production and distribution. One citizen approaches the court for having the right to brew liquor for his personal use**

Is that OK?

- **One agency is ready to extend help to the Tsunami victims in the camps and plans to collect blood samples to detect Typhoid, Dengue, Leptospirosis etc. The samples might be used for HIV/AIDS screening and preserved for future research**



Are the ethical principles applicable to 'populations'?



Curative Medicine Vs Public Health

- **Micro focus**
- **One to one – individual oriented**
- **Macro focus**
- **Community oriented**
- **Public Policy- both ethical factors and others like politics**
Eg: Provider-payment mechanisms

And moreover.....

**Public health departments
and personnel are often
part of the Government**

What is Public Health Ethics?

- **Ethics *of* Public Health**

Ethical Dimensions of professionalism and moral trust that society invests in professionals

- **Ethics *in* Public Health**

Trade offs between collective goods and individual interests

- **Ethics *for* Public Health**

Value of healthy communities; interests of populations, pragmatic methods

General Moral Considerations in Public Health (1)

- **Providing Benefits**
- **Avoiding, preventing, and removing harms**
- **Producing maximal balance of benefits over harms and other costs**
- **Distributing benefits and burdens fairly (Distributive Justice) and ensuring public participation**

General Moral Considerations in Public Health (2)

- **Respecting autonomous choices and actions, including liberty of action**
- **Protecting privacy and confidentiality**
- **Keeping promises and commitments**
- **Disclosing information as well as speaking honestly and truthfully**
- **Building and maintaining trust**

When conflict arises.....
“Justificatory conditions”

- **Effectiveness**
- **Proportionality**
- **Necessity**
- **Least infringement**
- **Public Justifications**

A simple set of ethical principles for practice of public health

- **Harm Principle**
- **Principle of least restrictive means**
- **Reciprocatory Principle**
- **Transparency Principle**

Harm Principle

“The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community , against his/her will, is to prevent harm to others. His/her own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant”

Least Restrictive Means

- **Selecting from among the available options**
- **Education, facilitation and discussion preceding the coercive methods**
- **“Siracusa Principle” – justified conditions for restriction of civil liberty- legal, legitimate and necessary, use least restrictive means that are reasonably available**

Reciprocatory Principle

- **Complying with public health requests may impose burdens on individuals – need to compensate**
- **Society must be prepared to facilitate individuals and communities in their efforts to discharge their duties**

Transparency Principle

- **Manner and the context in which decisions are made**
- **All legitimate stakeholders should be involved in the decision making process, have equal input into deliberations**
- **Decision making manner- clear and accountable**
- **Free of political interest or coercion, or domination by specific interests**

Why stick to ethical principles?

- **Imperative to protect the health and well-being of populations**
- **Respect for populations and their right for self-determination**
- **Protection of vulnerable populations**
- **Protecting privacy, integrity, and self-esteem of populations**
- **Equitable distribution of benefits**

Concepts of 'Harm' and 'wrong'

- **Difference between 'harming someone and 'wronging' them**
- **Steps that could be taken to avoid or minimize harms**

What's that again....?

Suppose someone enters your house (through an unlocked back door) and goes out leaving everything undisturbed.....

And he did not know your identity even.....

Have you suffered any harm?

Suppose.....

- **He/she was studying the natural habitat of bedbugs in your house.....**
- **He/she was studying the possibility of leakages in water supply to your house.....**
- **He/she was simply looking at why the back door was kept open even when the front door was locked.....**

Public Health Interventions

- **In Kerala there were strong protests against the legal enforcement of helmets and seat-belts.**
- **Why not close all the red-light zones in order to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDs ?**
- **Government of Maharashtra decided to close down all the Dance Bars**
- **Can we screen for genetic disorders and influence the carriers not to reproduce?**

Public Health Interventions

- **Is confidentiality being violated in supervised direct administration of drugs in RNTCP ?**
- **Do National Immunization Days (NIDs) and Mass Drug Administration (MDA) campaigns violate the principle of autonomy?**

Ethical Theories and public health

- **What is the consequence of any action?**
 - **Utilitarianism- ‘greatest happiness to greatest number of persons’- How to define and quantify pleasure?**

Yet, vaccination is acceptable as it brings benefit to a large number of people even though a small subgroup may experience the untoward effects of vaccine.

Population perspective of Health

- **Death and disease are social harms that require Governmental action – Eg. Immunization**
- **Need to understand diseases and risks in different groups in the community- who smokes? Which group has the highest incidence of CAD? – invaluable information for developing preventive strategies**

Preventive Paradox

“A preventive measure which brings much benefit to the population offers little to each participating individual”

- **Eg. Reducing the Cholesterol level by 5 mg % in a community**
- **Wearing seat belts- marginally lowers the individual's chances of being killed in a highway accident which already is very low and not appreciated much.**

Clinical and Public Health Ethics

- Long standing absence of a 'public health ethics' is being realized more and more now
- Human Rights thinking and action have become closely allied to public health work
- The Human-rights related roles of health personnel are receiving increased attention

Clinical and Public Health Ethics

- **Unawareness about human rights among the public health professionals can lead to their violation, though they do not intend to do so.**
- **“Inadvertent discrimination”- does the health message reach everyone equally? - access**

Different voices.....

- **Our fundamental attention in Public Health should not be directed toward a search for new technology, but rather towards breaking ethical and political barriers to minimizing death and disability – Dan E. Beauchamp**
- **Can we dispense with experiments using new technologies?**

Individual Vs Community

**“Private rights”
cease where
“public harm”
begins :
Golden rule in
Public Health**



Thank You

