

## *Challenges in Public Health Ethics*

Public health challenges are increase when social determinants of health are inadequate. Air pollution, poor water supply, poverty, inadequate housing and sewage management directly increase the diseases burden in the population.

- *Some challenges in public health ethics have been framed as questions below:*

(a) *Are there limits to individual autonomy?*

e.g vaccination programs?

Reasons to refuse public health interventions at the community level could be suspicion of political or social agenda, religious beliefs, and mistrust due to earlier bad experience.

Are women as one of vulnerable group empowered to refuse?

(b) *Can a patient refuse to be immunized?*

There is greater acceptance of immunization that promises immediate benefit, measles, and mumps vaccines in children, as opposed to that which promises benefit in the future, like human papilloma vaccine (HPV) and hepatitis B virus vaccine. There is also wariness about the expanding list of vaccines in child immunization schedules. Reports of side effects of vaccines can lead to distrust about newly introduced vaccines.

- (c) *Should a patient be compelled (forced) to receive treatment for a dangerous communicable diseases when community at risk?*

If a patient infected with Ebola virus refuses to be quarantined, doctors would have no enlist support from the law in public interest and enforce the health order until he is treated. In such situations, individual rights are superseded in the interest of public safety.

- (d) *What about self- causing illness?*

What is the obligation of the state or doctors to patients who make unhealthy choices? A person may choose to smoke despite the health warning or having unprotected sex while infected with HIV.

Freedom of choice is usually accompanied by the responsibility to choose well, keeping in mind personal and social. Individual lifestyle choices including drugs, smoking, diet all effect society not only to the individual.

(e) *How acceptable are high- cost medical rescue events?*

Extraordinary measures may be undertaken to save a single life, including airlifting of patients from danger zones or special treatment in hospitals.

Here benefits are often short-lived and the costs can be high specially in country with limited sources and inadequate health facilities?

(f) *Can neglect of confidentiality or privacy be justified (be a reason)?*

There are limits to patient confidentiality when the family or the public can be harmed by nondisclosure.

Sexual partners would be at risk in diseases like HIV or STDs.

The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over a member of a civilized community against his will is to prevent harm to others.

(g) *What are the ethical concerns with HIV in Public Health?*

An area where respect and autonomy of the individual has to be weighed against concerns of public health is treatment of people living with HIV/AIDS.

In hospitals excuses like inadequate protocols for HIV and the risk of infection to health care providers, has been cited as reasons to refuse admission to patients.