

Ethical Consideration Regarding COVID-19

Dr. Olga I Kubar*, Dr. Maina A Bichurina and Dr. Natalia I Romanenkova

St. Petersburg Pasteur Institute, Russia

***Corresponding Author:** Dr. Olga I Kubar, St. Petersburg Pasteur Institute, Russia.

Received: March 26, 2020; **Published:** April 04, 2020

St. Petersburg Pasteur Institute as the leader in conducting research on ethical and legal aspects of infectious diseases has a unique experience in different directions connected with the ethical application of surveillance of infectious diseases. In the previous publication we presented the ethical principles of eradication of infectious diseases. Faced with the urgent situation concerning COVID-19, it is of great importance to include the ethical component in preparation and management during the pandemic. The first reason for such solution is the historic lessons learned from former epidemics of infectious diseases. Regarding the current situation caused by COVID-19, it seems symbolic that the very first meeting of the world community with a severe form of infection caused by a SARS - 2002 became a kind of signal for ethical understanding and accumulation of experience in the ethical response to global epidemic phenomena. The documentary consequence of this process is the development in 2005 by the Joint Center for Bioethics (JCB) of the University of Toronto (Canada) of the first ethical planning guide for the pandemic period which was established and based on an interdisciplinary approach. It included the study of health problems with the dominant importance of assessments in the field of bioethics. At present, there is a list of guidelines on bioethics, which clearly show that the preparation and management of epidemics/pandemics should be based not only on reliable scientific data and sound public health principles, but also provide for the process of considering ethical issues and society's priorities of values, such as issues of social justice. Among internationally important documents there are guidelines created by CDC (2007), WHO (2013), declarations IBC and IGBC UNESCO on the epidemic caused by the Ebola virus (2014). It is evident that, at the time when COVID-19 started, the authorized international structures and the international community as a whole, had all the arsenal of principles and an algorithm of actions in the field of social behavioral response. The main aspects of the above mentioned documents, contained four key ethical positions, ten guiding and five procedural principles, which is important to take into account for making ethical decisions of the pandemic strategy. The principle goal of this message is based on the emphatic compliance with the ethical guidelines, which, in turn, provides for knowledge and proper interpretation of the conditions of COVID-19. The first point is the guarantee of obligations and responsibilities of the authorized bodies for organizing assistance to the population during outbreaks of infectious diseases. The second envisages the possibility of restrictive measures in relation to personal freedom in the interests of public health. The third point states that the concentration, management and justice in distribution of all available resources are necessary. The fourth underlines the importance of the solidarity and coordination of steps at the international level in terms of global management of the situation during the pandemic and speaks of the regulation of activities related to the movement of people. As part of the development of these key positions ten guidelines for ethical decision-making have been described, which include: the right to personal freedom, protection against harm, proportionality, privacy, obligations to provide medical care, interaction, justice, trust, solidarity and governance. In terms of the application to the today situation of COVID-19, each of these principles provides a corresponding understanding and action. The ethical principle of the right to personal freedom under the conditions of a pandemic, to which, of course, the current situation belongs, supposes restrictions on personal freedom in order to protect the whole society which stipulated by the legislation of many states. In this case, restrictions on freedom should be made in proportion to the need, with accompanied by the use of

minimum measures, they should be appropriate and fair. The implementation of the principle of protecting the society from harm does not exclude (and often requires) the actions of the authorized health authorities related to the restriction of personal freedoms. The adoption of such decisions should include balanced imperative measures to reach an agreement on their implementation and justification, as well as provide the public with the reasons for such measures. It should also create a mechanism for monitoring the decisions and steps taken in this area. Considering the current experience of COVID-19, measures related to the monitoring of this area, and the inclusion of a mechanism for operational adjustments, require special developments with mandatory consideration of factors of social psychology and ethical content. Proportionality implies the fact that the restriction of personal freedom and measures to protect society from harm should not go beyond what is really justified by the current level of risk or critical need for the whole society. Commitment to medical care and empathy for suffering are an integral part of all professional codes of ethics in medicine. Health workers should adequately assess the requirements of their professional role in comparison with other obligations existing in relation to their own health, their family and other circumstances that go beyond their professional duty. At the same time, it is extremely important that the principle of interaction should be observed. This principle requires from the society the necessity to support those who bear a disproportionate burden to protect public interests and take all the necessary steps to minimize this burden. Justice in the context of this situation represents the right assigned to each patient to receive the medical care he needs. Moreover, the difference between observing this right under normal medical practice and during a pandemic is that during a pandemic it is applicable to the reasonable standard for choosing the type of first aid that is necessary to give. Under these conditions, trust becomes an integral component of the relationship between the doctor and the patient, employees and their organizations, society and authorized bodies. The particular ethical challenge during the pandemic is, of course, associated with the factor of building public confidence and achieving coherence and cooperation between health professionals and the society. It is obvious, that trust is based on a multicomponent and long-term experience in assessing the quality of medical services and social protection by the population, which dictates an indispensable requirement for a stable and guaranteed improvement of the healthcare system in the future. Pandemics clearly reflect all the imperfections of the existing public health systems, as the current situation has also demonstrated on the global scale. In addition to state guarantees regarding the quality of medical products and services, the quality of information support builds trust and forms a prerequisite for all anti-epidemic measures. The fact of the need to inform the public about the threats associated with the pandemic and the protective measures always takes an important responsible place in the operational documents of the authorities. According to COVID-19, the selection of information block demonstrates sometimes the lack of objectivity, completeness, balance of benefits/ risks. It is extremely important because the quality of information provided/received by an individual and society as a whole, determines understanding, acceptance and subsequent actions, which ultimately determines the success of anti-epidemic and medical interventions during epidemic situation. A pandemic requires a new look at the process of global solidarity and solidarity of nation. A pandemic challenges the ideas of national sovereignty, secrecy and isolation of territories. A pandemic requires joint and concerted action within and between different institutions, calls for a review of the traditional value of their own or territorial interests inherent in work. One of the most critical moments demonstrated in the current epidemic situation and unequivocally requiring subsequent in-depth analysis and search for solutions is the social and humanitarian dependence of scientific and technological developments, which requires strengthening the efforts of the scientific community to produce the a arsenal of means and methods for protection against future challenges and threats. Summing up the materials presented in this message, it can be stated that the goal of achieving the ethical integrity of decisions and actions at all levels of management in an emergency situation caused by an infectious disease is based on following the principles of social responsibility, solidarity, openness, soundness and accountability to the society.

© All rights reserved by Dr. Olga I Kubar., et al.