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## Micro Ethics in Control of Communicable Diseases

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**How to cite this article:**

Shubhada Sunil Avachat. Micro Ethics in Control of Communicable Diseases. Indian J Comm Dis. 2020;6(2):49-51

**Abstract**

Communicable disease outbreaks having high infectivity often result into epidemics and sometimes pandemics and have potential to cause threat to public health. Conflicts may arise while implementing preventive strategies to control the spread of communicable diseases having potential threat to public health. Micro ethics deals with almost every domain of interaction between doctor and patient while providing health care to individual patient. Micro ethical issues are highly variable and difficult to standardize but still play crucial role in doctor patient relationship. However these issues are often barely addressed hence there is a urgent need to address and update micro ethics as far as control of communicable diseases is concerned.

**Keywords:** Communicable Diseases Control; Micro Ethics.

**Introduction****Background**

Ethical issues constitute an important domain in providing health care to the patient and should be well addressed in order to avoid conflicts. Conflicts arise when there is the difference in opinion or moral values or traditions in medical practice, and hence, certain code of ethics or regulations has been evolved in the past few decades in the context of medical care. Health care workers frequently face with ethical challenges while providing health care services to the community.<sup>1-2</sup> Ethical issues in Hospitals are well addressed however the need of ethics support in community health services is a bit neglected and unmet.<sup>3-5</sup> Ethics is what happens in every interaction between every doctor and every patient.<sup>6</sup> Therefore every medical professional should have adequate knowledge regarding ethical

guidelines in day to day practice.

Provision of Ethical support and guidelines to community health workers is the need of the hour and should be tailored depending upon the workplace, health problems incident and prevalent in the regions etc.<sup>1</sup>

**Micro ethics and Public Health**

Micro ethics is a broad term which includes the entire process of interaction between doctor and the patient including history taking, physical examination advising investigations and choosing treatment while delivering health care to the patient for a particular disease. Micro ethical issues are highly variable depending upon the individual disease case and hence very difficult to standardize. But it is an important domain of doctor patient relationship and might influence the outcome of the treatment.<sup>7</sup>

Since preventive medicine is based on the assumption that protection of public health is primary, individual rights and freedom of choice may be overruled, as, for example, in the case of mandatory testing and isolation for communicable diseases.<sup>8</sup>

While implementing preventive strategies to control the spread of communicable diseases having potential threat to public health, conflicts may arise. Such conflicts partly arise from individual rights and issues that may affect community interests, or problems arising due to certain tension cultural beliefs and practices.

The epidemiological information about the emerging infectious diseases is not adequate to control these diseases which may result into outbreaks. Communicable disease outbreaks having high infectivity often result into epidemics and sometimes pandemics and have potential to cause threat to public health. Because of scientific uncertainty, issues like lack of effective treatment, burden on health care services and social and institutional disruption leading to panic in the community. Such situations often force the policy makers and public health experts to compromise certain ethical issues for the public health interest.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Ethical challenges in controlling the communicable diseases*

As far as public health is concerned early diagnosis and treatment is crucial not only for the individual but also for the entire community. Ethical issues related to public health and regarding prevention of communicable diseases often involve conflicting rights and values. There are also conflicting rights i.e., the right of coerced individuals to autonomy versus the rights of others to health (or their rights not to be harmed by being infected). Each of these values and rights is legitimate; and, arguably, none should be given absolute priority over the others. A key ethical question about mandatory treatment is, thus, how great the threat to others (and public health in general) would need to be in order for mandatory treatment to be justified. Informed consent to diagnostic testing is usually considered essential in standard biomedical ethics discourse regarding doctor-patient relationships. Testing of tissues or other biological samples also sometimes takes place, for research or surveillance purposes, without patients' or donors' awareness or consent (e.g., testing of stored sputum samples to determine TB drug resistance prevalence). Cases such as these may pose conflict between the goal to promote public health.<sup>9</sup>

Certain communicable diseases readily cross local as well as national boundaries therefore effective infectious disease control policy should be developed at national level. Communitarianism theory of ethics is more suitable for setting effective control policy considering the ethical dilemmas in the broader social sphere.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Ethical issues related to Covid 19*

Since the beginning of 2020 the entire world is facing the of Covid 19 pandemic. Lot of panic was created by the fast spread of disease due to its high infectivity though the virulence was less.

Lot of ethical issues aroused due to mandatory testing of high risk individuals while implementing isolation and quarantine measures, during recommendations of certain drugs and advising other modalities from Homeopathy, Ayurveda etc as prophylactic measures. High infectivity and pathogenicity of Covid 19 Virus resulted into huge number of cases burdening the health care system of India.

Lack of adequate knowledge about the epidemiology of the disease turned out as high morbidity and mortality in the beginning which resulted into panic among the people and as a consequence of it patients as well as health care workers treating the patients suffered from stigmatization and discrimination. Health Systems and health care workers faced a lot of ethical, social challenges. Political leaders and decision makers also had lot of political, legal issues while deciding the strategies for complete Lock Down.

As a medical professional there is ethical binding to provide health care to every patient who need it irrespective of race, religion, gender, socioeconomic status etc but due to high risk of exposure while treating covid 19 patient, personal protective equipment kit must be available and assessable to every health care provider including support staff.

The another major ethical issue was maintaining the confidentiality of the test report and communicating it to health team as well as close contacts of the patient. In order to protect themselves health care providers and close contacts of the patient should be aware about the test status of the patient. Ultimately, given the high morbidity and mortality rates and the degree of contagiousness of COVID-19, confidentiality must be limited by public health interests.<sup>11</sup>

It is also crucial that physicians and hospital systems report positive cases to public agencies so that data can be accurately tabulated and analyzed

in order to implement control measures and also for allocation of resources.<sup>11</sup>

Micro ethical issues are highly variable and difficult to standardize but still play crucial role in doctor patient relationship. However these issues are often barely addressed hence there is a urgent need to address and update micro ethics as far as control of communicable diseases is concerned.

### Conclusion

Considering the potential threat of emerging and re emerging infectious diseases that may result in epidemics and may be pandemics in near future some macro ethical and micro ethical issues concerned to prevention and control of communicable diseases must be addressed in detail and a uniform strategy should be finalized and implemented worldwide.

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