

American University in Cairo

AUC Knowledge Fountain

Faculty Journal Articles

Spring 3-1-2021

COVID-19 and Ethical Dilemmas

Laila El Baradei

American University in Cairo, lbaradei@aucegypt.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://fount.aucegypt.edu/faculty_journal_articles



Part of the [Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

APA Citation

Baradei, L. (2021). COVID-19 and Ethical Dilemmas. *PATIMES*,
https://fount.aucegypt.edu/faculty_journal_articles/4389

MLA Citation

Baradei, Laila El "COVID-19 and Ethical Dilemmas." *PATIMES*, 2021,
https://fount.aucegypt.edu/faculty_journal_articles/4389

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by AUC Knowledge Fountain. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Journal Articles by an authorized administrator of AUC Knowledge Fountain. For more information, please contact fountadmin@aucegypt.edu.

This is an author's draft of an article published in the PA Times.

The final version, the version of record, is available online at:

<https://patimes.org/covid-19-and-ethical-dilemmas/>



COVID-19 and Ethical Dilemmas

We are all living in a global pandemic. Lives are being lost. Many of us have already contracted the virus or know close friends and/or family members who have. The lucky ones who get light symptoms heal quickly, while others go through a hellish period, and daily discover new side effects and complications related to their illness. Regardless of what group you belong to, and whether you got ill or not, we are all affected. Around the globe, people are anxious trying to cope with the new normal: working from home, tending to school children receiving an online education, going through repeated periods of lock-downs and curfews, social distancing and wearing masks and face shields that hide facial expressions and make us all hard of hearing.

During periods of calamity and crisis, especially one like a pandemic that entails so many lives being lost, paralleled with a lack of clarity about who is going to be next to go, this gets everyone to rethink their priorities in life. There is a high chance that we may drop soon, so let us make sure we are spending our time in this life in the best way possible and on things that matter. Let us try to stick to our moral values. Let us all try to be more ethical. **COVID-19 has instigated a lot of ethical questions and dilemmas at different levels that are exceedingly challenging. These ethical dilemmas are witnessed globally, nationally, in the medical field and for public policymakers, educators and public administrators.**

Ethical Dilemmas in the medical field: If anything, more ethical dilemmas were encountered by medical staff. Going through triage, and trying to figure which patients to give priority treatment to, was the most grueling ethical dilemma of all. In deciding on how to allocate a limited number of ventilators, staff had to decide to exclude patients above a certain age, or patients suffering from other fatal diseases or disabilities. Several professional medical associations published triage recommendations in an effort to help the medical staff. Debates also started on whether health workers are obliged to risk their own lives and serve during the pandemic, especially when no sufficient protective gear was available. In deciding on how to distribute vaccines, a lot of ethical questions arose, including whether giving priority to the most vulnerable groups was the most ethical decision to pursue.

Ethical Dilemmas Facing Public Policymakers: As a result of COVID-19, there is a huge demand for allocating additional resources to the health sector. This presents an ethical dilemma to the policymakers, many of whom are not savvy about public health issues. When deciding on budget priorities the question becomes how to achieve the best ethical balance between allocations to the health sector, versus allocations to education and other economic sectors. A simple cost benefit analysis does not fit well with the health sector and the need for its prioritization during the pandemic.

Dealing with the Digital Divide: With the pandemic comes more reliance on ICT for rendering services, enabling telecommuting, continuing online education, buying essentials through online shopping or receiving medical advice and services. It then becomes an ethical issue when governments move forward with their digitization plans and ignore the needs of the poorer groups, who either do not have access to the internet or who find its cost inhibiting. This is another ethical dilemma.

Fair Access to Vaccines and a Global Ethical Dilemma: With the relatively limited access of vaccines for developing countries, not just an ethical dilemma arises on the global level, but also a global health hazard in the long term. The COVID-19 Global Access Facility (COVAX) is an initiative that was established at the World Health Organization for that purpose. They are trying their best to work against the seemingly unethical practices of some developed countries that are hoarding on vaccines. It is claimed that Canada has bought vaccines to cover its population five times! The problem is that this hoarding will not help in combating the virus worldwide and will allow for new variants of the virus to appear and spread quickly, even in rich countries.

Individual Ethical Dilemmas: Going through the pandemic, citizens' moral values are tested in many ways. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2019, people's behaviors are affected during a crisis situation, many times negatively. They may try to get unwarranted privileges, like jumping the line to obtain the vaccine, or they may engage in stigmatization of the affected others. However, in parallel, some positive behaviors are also exhibited during crises. Because we are all in the same boat, metaphorically speaking, we try to help one another more. Many community initiatives have started during the pandemic to support the sick and needy, either by distributing medicines and food items, giving access to oxygen tanks or sharing vital information about healthcare services and their availability.

These are tough and challenging times for everybody. We hope we will be able to handle and resolve all those ethical dilemmas to the best of our ability and get out of it as better people.