

## STATEMENT FROM THE BIOETHICS SOCIETY OF THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING CARIBBEAN (BSEC) ON COVID-19

With more than 173 countries globally affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, the explosion of information and misinformation circulating among various media platforms leads BSEC to offer related ethical resources and perspectives for its members. Ill-health (both physical and psychological) caused by this pandemic is accompanied by major ethical concerns with respect to personal and social responsibilities, economic adversities, and vulnerabilities. Without vaccines and approved therapeutics, the primary method of controlling this disease is by an efficiently performing public healthcare system together with full cooperation of the society.

1. Healthcare ethics surround *inter alia* resource allocation and rationing: a) Immediate strengthening of public healthcare, by allocating more resources. b) Rationing of services should be guided by a pre-determined set of ethically sound criteria, taking into consideration age, gender, pre-existing co-morbidities, socioeconomic status and marginalized individuals (*distributive justice*). Every institution should establish strong networking facilities and implement these criteria in a coordinated approach as far as possible (*solidarity and international cooperation*).
2. Frontline responders should not be in a position to decide between self-care and patient-care. Personal protective equipment (PPE) must be provided for safeguarding healthcare providers and law-enforcement officers.
3. Hoarding of drugs, PPE, and use of untested drugs should be avoided at all cost.
4. Healthcare research must adhere to the highest ethical standards.
5. In a social setting, during a lockdown, despite ‘autonomy’ of individuals, ethical responsibility of concern for others (*beneficence*) is tantamount; as well as protecting the health information of patients and avoiding the spread of unauthentic information in social media.
6. Business people should avoid price-hiking (gouging), hoarding essential amenities, distributing things on sectarian or other such discriminatory basis.
7. Concern for health and safety must take precedence over economic concerns.

BSEC reinforces the personal and social ethical responsibilities of every global citizen during these trying times to work collectively and effectively by adhering to policies based on scientific strategies while adhering to strict ethical standards.

To this end, we share the following noteworthy resources designed for physicians and other health professionals:

1. <https://www.thehastingscenter.org/ethicalframeworkcovid19/>
2. PAHO Ethics Guidance Document for Covid-19: <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/ethics-guidance-key-issues-raised-novel-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-pandemic>
3. WHO Guidance for Managing Ethical Issues in Infectious Disease Outbreaks: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/250580/9789241549837-eng.pdf;jsessionid=51940C75C64B74BDE6841074E214BC51?sequence=1>
4. UNESCO guidelines: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373115>
5. Article critique from a Caribbean perspective on Addressing the Challenge for expedient ethical review of research in disasters and disease outbreaks: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/bioe.12543>