



# Ethical Considerations in the Healthcare Field: A Focus on Global Health\*

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This paper aimed to examine the ethical considerations that are the basis for many functions in the healthcare field. The key ethical values in global health, as well as future considerations imperative to this area, were observed. **Research design, data and methodology:** The current study utilized the past literature studies that were examined in the field of global health. An overview of the role of ethics in the healthcare field, as well as important considerations that needed to be taken into account in order to provide advancements in this area, were investigated. **Results:** Ethics are an important set of principles that guides humankind into the right conduct or action to better society and each other. Ethical values are one of the pinnacle points for any healthcare provider, as healthcare is not only considered from the aspect of patient health and well-being, but also in its role of keeping ethical guidelines to achieve the best possible care for a patient. **Conclusions:** A comprehensive understanding of healthcare is needed in order to tackle next generational challenges in global health. These ethical considerations will inevitably play a significant role in harnessing the patient-healthcare professional relationships as well as care for the shortening of a global disparity on healthcare.

**Keywords :** Ethics, Healthcare, Global Health, International

**JEL Classification Codes :** I10, I11

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## 1. Introduction

With the rapidly evolving world beckoned by globalization, it has become apparent that technological advances are at the peak of its foundation and has allowed for an increased quality of life for many people around the globe. With the advent of the advances in technology as well as various areas, this has aided in the flourishing of disciplines that has gained traction with the inclusion of technology into its practices. Of these, one of the most prominent parts that has seen a rise in advances has been in global health. Regardless of the changing times, health always was and always will be a pertinent aspect of

humankind, and one that we are always striving to make improvements in. Thus, with increasing advances in this area, the peoples' focus has turned to the emerging needs for improving healthcare and living a longer and more prosperous life. With the plethora of knowledge and improvements in hygiene as well as nutrition, this will be a crucial field that will continue to receive interest as the world's population continues to increase in life span.

As with other advancing fields of discipline in the globalized world, interest in the healthcare related areas have increased from both the research and business aspect.

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Regardless of the area in healthcare, it can be said that people will only increase their support and interest in this field leveled with the incorporation of technology. With that, it is also becoming important to consider the ethical implications of global health and its related fields. Ethical behavior as well as values are a crucial part of humankind and one that is also essential in the healthcare world. As global health is an interdisciplinary part of understanding healthcare and its role worldwide, healthcare providers need to be well-equipped to deal with any healthcare situations or dilemmas that might arise regarding ethical considerations. Healthcare, as much as any discipline, is finding the arising need to set standards and guidelines that might aid in doing the best for humankind.

Therefore, this current study has aimed to examine the ethical considerations in the healthcare setting from an international context, with the focus on global health. There are many aspects to consider in the ethical aspects of healthcare, and it is one of the many observation points of this paper to shed some light on some of the methods in which ethics play a role for healthcare providers. With this research, it is deemed that some of the common ethical considerations in healthcare will be shared to healthcare professionals as well as scholars related to this field, and offer illuminating points that might give them a better idea of how ethics serves an important role in the global health context.

## **2. Understanding Global Health**

Global health can be said to be an interdisciplinary field where healthcare is examined in an international setting. With the rise in globalization and the permeation of technological advances throughout many parts of the world, people from various parts of the world are able to interact and move across borders. Thus, active exchange of cultures on a global level has instigated a greater importance in understanding the health trends and issues for various countries. Global health encompasses various disciplines, which are not restricted to cultural studies, sociology, public policy, and economic disparities, to name a few.

There are many types of health, which can vary from the individual health to international health and global health. An individual's health can be addressed as not only the state of being that is free from ailments or disease, but also a state of well-being in the physical and mental aspects as well (Tejada de Rivero, 2003). Additionally, the form of public health is one in which it is focused on the social aspects of health, namely the epidemiology and statistics of health issues on a social scale (Powers & Faden, 2006).

In regards to these, international and global health are

sometimes used synonymously but have slightly different meanings in terms of context. International health has its focal point on health across boundaries and nations, where organizations from one part of the boundary or nation usually aids in the poorer areas and nations (Birn, 2009). With this in mind, global health can be considered to be a completely different viewpoint of health in that it deals not with the borders and boundaries that separates nations, but transcends them. Global health is the endeavor to prevent disease and promote well-being without being limited by borders or nations. It is in essence the communication and control of diseases on a global scale, and the achievement of good global health for humankind (Verweij & Dawson, 2007).

Global health is an important part of humanity where there is an intimate relationship between economic and social forces that can have unforeseen consequences for humanity as a whole (Benatar, 2009). It cannot be denied that environmental degradation as well as disparities in health and economic levels have adverse effects for global health. Thus, it is in the best interests of humanity to set forth in investigating methods to close the gap in health and economics and raise the overall quality of life on a worldwide scale.

## **3. Viewpoints in Global Health**

There are many elements to be considered in global health. Healthcare can be viewed in many perspectives, some of which include the technological, bioethical, economic, and the sociological perspective. Moreover, some of the issues that have permeated throughout global health to be a hazard includes such topics as pandemics, factors of the environment, and economic disparities, resulting in a gap in the healthcare that can be received by various countries. Pandemics are a rising and pressing issue in global health, with examples such as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Ebola, and the most recent outbreak of the Covid19. The most pressing concern with the global disease outbreaks is that it is only after individuals are already infected that diagnosing and treating symptoms might become a possibility. This entails that there might be heavy mortality rates in between the times that the outbreak had started and the treatment for them are found.

The most recent example can be said to be the Covid19, with large mortality rates all around the world and treatments that are not able to eradicate the outbreak. With such diseases, it is imperative that the global health works in cutting the disease off at the source and offering regulations in place for nations to be better equipped to deal with unforeseen medical circumstances. Another concern that might seem to be benign compared to the recent outbreaks, but also have fatal outcomes, are the issues of the environmental factors. Issues

such as climate change and pollution, not to mention sanitary concerns such as water sanitation, all play a role in the health of mass human populations. Many efforts have been offered to aid in the mitigation of the environmental factors' effects, such as the sanitation of water and the use of bottled water, as well as education and prevention for future environmental effects. Moreover, it is imperative that the prevention of such challenges is discussed and evaluated so that human health is not threatened by such variables.

Not only that, one of the key issues in global health includes the problem of economic disparities and as a result, a lack of access to basic healthcare. As global health is a concern that affects not only certain parts of the world, but all continents, there has been the issue that there is a glaring gap in the access to the basic healthcare treatments and benefits which should be available to all. Most parts of the world still lack the basic fundamental access to health education and health care, and as a result, diseases which could have been prevented have spread to certain parts of the globe. Several nations are malnutrition, and also have a high mortality rate from ailments that include but are not restricted to sexually transmitted diseases, and high mortality rates in children. Areas of regions might be in shortage of doctors or basic medical supplies, while other parts contain a plethora of such resources.

It is troubling to discern that unfortunately, the trend of the state of global health tends to follow that of the wealthier nations, where care and treatment is offered at will and are abundant. The economic and geographical disparities will need to be addressed and active behaviors enacted to make sure that the gaps are not widened but rather shortened with the help of the wealthier nations. Situations such as income inequality or geography, should not be seen as an issue in offering humankind access to healthcare and medical help that they might require. Therefore, it is important for healthcare professionals to step up and explore methods in which healthcare can be accessible to all on a global scale regardless of the status or the economic contribution they offer to the world economy as a whole. Underrepresented communities might be able to rise and be heard in their plea for help with the aid of healthcare systems that are able to help them through funds or other methods in the global setting.

### 3.1. Technological Aspects in Global Health

A comprehensive understanding of healthcare is needed in order to tackle the next generation challenges that the world would thrust in global health. First and foremost, it cannot be ignored that technological advances have paved the way for a new era of global health and the way we are able to access it. With the invention of the advancement of technology, it has become possible to keep records of patient files on a broader scale and offer computerized data of accurate evaluations of

symptoms and the possible treatment methods. Moreover, technology has contributed greatly to the many areas of medicine, which include the cardiac and prosthetic joints fields. But, as much as there are pros to the advancement of technology, it cannot be ignored that equal opportunity will not be given for countries with varying economic standards. It is imperative to ask the question of how the technological benefits that are assessable in some countries can become assessable to other nations as well, which might not have the economic stronghold and the background for the keeping of such technology. What would be the ethically viable way to ensure that the people across the globe are able to receive equal care and opportunity? There are many ethical claims that can be thought in the context of whether it would be acceptable to offer advanced treatment options or suggestions for diseases in some parts of the world through technology but not in others. How far and how equal should technology be utilized in various parts of the globe and which countries should offer aid to which and other pressing questions are all a pervasive aspect of the ethical considerations in global health (Deber, 2008).

### 3.2. Economic and Sociological Aspects in Global Health

There are many economic perspectives to be considered in the global health region, not to mention the sociological effects as well. One of the main economic perspectives of the global health is the issue of unequal treatment plans that some countries are offered compared to others because of their economic superiority. It is an inevitable conclusion to a world where the gauging of world powers is largely through the assessment of economic strength and superiority. This can be also explained in terms of how pharmaceutical companies will be more inclined to create and develop drugs that will benefit a select few, instead of larger masses, in favor of profits. This is an example of how healthcare can be abused and viewed as another profit line, and one that is played on a large scale worldwide.

Moreover, this would entail that an understanding is needed in the assessment of the common ailments of health that is prevalent across the world and acting upon such knowledge. A genuine interest in global health as well as the setting of goals to make sure that health for humankind is sustained in the future is needed (Bensimon & Benatar, 2006). It is also to be noted that many of the ailments of global health are not only the effects of natural diseases, but some also stem from the problems that are man-made. An awareness that a viable global health starts with an individual's commitment to pursuing an environmentally friendly lifestyle is also a crucial part. Bioterrorism, which is largely manmade, might be able to be mitigated through the persistent efforts of nations to improve health security and make sure that accidental release

of such substances is prevented.

#### **4. Ethical Aspects in the Healthcare Context**

Ethical values are one of the pinnacle points for any healthcare provider, as healthcare is not only the considerations of patient health and well-being, but the keeping in accordance of ethical guidelines to achieve the best possible care for a patient. Usually, ethical examinations are not at the forefront of healthcare fields, but there are many cases in which the healthcare providers are at conflicting zones with how to proceed in their patient care. Thus, ethical concerns might aid in formulating a set of guidelines and rules with which to better aid the healthcare providers in dealing with unusual situations or medical dilemmas. This will be able to support the quality care that patients deserve and ones that healthcare professionals are always striving to offer in the clinical setting.

Ethics are an important set of principles that guides humankind into the right conduct or action to better society and each other. The word ethics derives from the Greek word “ethos” that means character. With ethics, a form of universal set of rules of conduct can be organized in which the compass of right and wrong might be able to be determined and set for people to follow in a societal setting (Östman et al., 2019). With actions of people leads to the consequences of such actions, so it is pertinent that people are guided to make the right choices under good motivations and intentions. Ethics also leads in the fine line of making the suitable judgments to various situations, and it is without a doubt an important consideration for the medical world.

This can be incorporated into the context of the epidemic vaccine trials and its potential ethical considerations. With the rise in the recent outbreak of Covid19, there has been a struggle to contain the pandemic on a global scale. One of the most effective ways in which the outbreak might be combatted is through vaccines (Schwartz, 2018). However, there are always the issues of ethical considerations, as it might invariably involve the use of potential human subjects in the testing of the efficacy of the vaccines produced. As much as the case for the Covid19 outbreak was unprecedented, so was the vaccine procurement processes. Usually, the creation of vaccines would take many years, with many clinical trials to assess and confirm the viability and effectiveness of the vaccine (Plotkin et al., 2017; Molyneux, 2017). But, in regards to the circumstances, it has been difficult to tread this well-known path in the making of the vaccines. Many of the ethical debates surrounding this current issue has been whether candidates should be collected in a randomized study for the vaccine clinical trials, or providing the vaccines to many people, withholding the possibility of a randomized control group (London, 2019). There are no right

answers for this, and it is a dilemma in which many of the fates of the people are hanging in the balance. These ethical considerations in light of the pandemic should be taken into careful consideration, and deliberated with caution. As is the case with all global health issues, human research subjects should be protected, and the quest for novel and safer vaccines should be relentlessly pursued.

### **5. Types of Ethical Considerations in Healthcare**

#### **5.1. Human Relationships in Healthcare**

In the process of delivering care for patients in the healthcare sector, it is inevitable that there will arise issues in terms of ethical concerns. As healthcare is universal, there might be clashes that occur stemming from areas such as geographical, social, cultural, and personal viewpoints. Some of these include issues such as patient relationships or malpractice. In terms of patient relationships, it is important to consider that healthcare providers are offering a service and care from a human relationship (Emanuel et al., 2000). It is imperative to forge an understanding with the healthcare provider and the patient, but the relationship should always be in a professional matter. When the healthcare professionals and the patients enter into a personal relationship, it is grounds for violating the rights of the patients. This is considered in a serious light, with the healthcare professional possibly facing penalty and a loss in license, as well as being sued and barred from offering future healthcare services. In all, this is considered to be a serious ethical problem as it is deemed that the healthcare professional that entered into a personal relationship with a patient would do so in a display of an abuse of power, and that the patient would be considered a victim, unable to defend themselves.

#### **5.2. Patient Confidentiality in Healthcare**

Moreover, one of the other issues in ethics for healthcare is in patient confidentiality. Although the emphasis on this has been drawn many times, it is nevertheless one of the most crucial aspects of the patient where trust is involved. Violating this trust can have disastrous consequences for the healthcare professional and hurt the patient as a result. Because this is a concern that is on the forefront of all patients, the Health Insurance Portability and Accounting Act (HIPAA) have clear stated laws that explain the rights and release conditions of the patient’s medical information. As with all ethical considerations, it is wise to keep in mind that there always exists a shade of unclear gray in the midst of the guidelines, and it is in the best interests for the patient and the healthcare professional to act accordingly to the given situation when dealing with this sensitive information. As mentioned

previously, trust is an important keystone in the patient and healthcare professional relationship. A patient's private information is an ethical consideration that deserves more attention in the future as technological advances become more utilized in regards to hospital data and information storage.

### 5.3. Malpractice in Healthcare

In the healthcare world, there are inevitably several points where mistakes or negligence from the healthcare professionals might result in consequences for the patients. In light of this, it cannot be omitted from the context of healthcare to bring up the topic of malpractice and negligence of healthcare professionals, and what those repercussions might be for the healthcare community. Usually, it can be stated that the malpractice of healthcare professionals rises in situations where the patients get harmed in the course of medical treatment or by instruments. It cannot be certain if this is the result of the negligence of healthcare workers, but it is important to keep in mind that repercussions, mainly the threat of litigation, always hangs in the case of a treatment gone wrong. Thus, it is in the best interests and imperative for both the patients and the healthcare professionals to be careful in the medical treatments. As the healthcare world is in dealing with the precarious balance of life and death for patients, it is becoming more important than ever to enforce strict regulations and guidelines to make sure that the patients are offered the best care possible. Moreover, these enforcements of regulations will also enable healthcare professionals to be able to perform their jobs with the most efficiency, while also keeping in line with practicing integrity for offering patient care (Epstein, & Turner, 2015).

### 5.4. Code of Ethics in Healthcare

The concept of "do no harm" is intricately involved with the ethical issues concerning physician assisted suicide which is a major consideration for both the patient and the healthcare professional. This ties in with the ethical concern of informed consent. In any hospital setting where the patient is about to receive treatment, they do so with the full awareness of the procedures of the medical treatment they are about to undergo, as well as possible other options. The patient is aware of the risks which the medical treatment entails and has the choice of deciding which treatment they prefer to undergo. This is the example of an informed consent, which is a crucial step before the patient undergoes any treatments from the healthcare professionals. The patients have full knowledge about the procedures in the medical treatments and have voiced their opinions on the type of treatment they wish to receive.

As much as the patient and healthcare professional

relationship is a human relationship, it is pertinent for not only the patient to provide the healthcare professional with informed consent, but also for the medical teams to be aware of the code of ethics. The patient is always the first and the most primary concern for the healthcare professionals. Making sure that the healthcare professionals practice integrity and strict ethical principles in their work are essential in contributing to patient care. Thus, the four principles of ethics should always be put into consideration which include beneficence, justice, autonomy, and non-maleficence.

## 6. Conclusions

### 6.1. Summary

This current research examined the ethical considerations in the field of healthcare by the context of global health. With the advent of technological advances and increase in the overall level of lifestyle and health enjoyed by the modern generation, it is inevitable that healthcare and systems will continue to play an important role in peoples' lives. Global health is a vast discipline that is not restricted to certain cultures or borders or age groups, and will need to improve in order to better facilitate humankind into a healthier and happier generation.

The healthcare systems are in essence a connection of human relationships, from the patient to the healthcare professionals. As with all relationships, it is crucial to understand the various aspects and rules that sets the balance for what each party can offer to the other. Healthcare professionals will need to be aware of the ethical considerations that might arise with new cases in their endeavor to treat patients. As the times are moving to an era where technology will offer people longer and productive lives, healthcare professionals will need to be better equipped to deal with novel ethical cases as well as diseases that might have not occurred before.

In a world where the global health is a complex term and the levels of health vary from one country to another, as well as across different cultures, the field of healthcare will need to become more vigilant in connecting the links between lifestyle, economics, human rights, and development. This is to ensure that at the forefront of the healthcare sector, their main goal is not lost, which is to treat the patient. Thus, the ethical considerations will inevitably play a significant role in harnessing the patient-healthcare professional relationship and developing to offer care for the shortening of a global disparity on healthcare.

### 6.2. Limitations and Directions for Future Studies

This paper observed the ethical considerations of global health and healthcare as a whole, and inevitably came across some limitations. As this study examined the past studies on ethics and its role in the healthcare sector and global health as a whole, there were only the resources of past research to offer as a baseline of search in this paper. Thus, this entails that whatever areas of ethics were not examined deeply were also not reflected in this paper as well. Moreover, ethical considerations in healthcare is a broad topic and one that might gain illuminating results if it were specified to a certain area of expertise. There are many aspects of the healthcare world to discuss for ethical implications, including the ethical considerations in depth on where to draw the line for a patient who refuses care even if they would die as a result of not getting the suggested treatment by the healthcare specialists. The area of ethical considerations is an interesting yet tough area to gauge for study, as it is one where there is no right answer and we can only hope to shorten the gap of disparity between reality and the ideal conditions. The revision and improvements on ethics in the healthcare format will be needed with the beckoning of the technological era, where it will inevitably bring about many changes to the global health platform as well. Therefore, some suggestions for the area of study will be to delve into the ethical considerations from the healthcare aspect with a focus on the economic state of the various nations and see how this has an effect. Moreover, studies on some of the common ethical issues that are more frequent in a few parts of the countries compared to others will make for an intriguing research. Also, studies where suggestions for how the social and economic disparity can be relived in various parts of the globe will also prove to be a meaningful study in the ethical considerations' context.

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