

# Ethical and Policy Considerations in COVID-19: Challenges Over the Course of a Pandemic and Looking Ahead to our Post-COVID Future

Jeffrey Kahn, PhD, MPH  
Andreas C. Dracopoulos Director  
Johns Hopkins Berman Institute of Bioethics



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## Some Features of Clinical Medicine vs. Public Health

- Patient-provider relationship vs. health of the community
- Medical intervention to treat and cure vs. largely non-medical means to prevent and promote
- Similarly-trained professionals vs. diverse group working towards collective effort
- Justice as distribution vs. social justice, rights to health (care), disparities in access and outcomes
- Differing characteristics lead to different ethical challenges
  - Ethical approaches from traditional bioethics don't map well onto public health

## Competing Ethics Frameworks

### **Patient centered ethical framework**

- Autonomy (Individual focus)
- Patient preferences & values used to balance benefits & burdens
- Access generally determined by first come first served or severity

### **Public Health ethical framework**

- Focused on health of the population
- Just allocation of resources
  - Efficiency
  - Equity

# Ethics and Allocation of Scarce Resources

- Allocation of scarce resources during this pandemic is something we all hope doesn't need to happen
- Allocation is part of health care in non-pandemic times
  - Solid organs
  - Access to very expensive therapies or technologies
- What hospitals and clinicians faced and continue to be facing
  - Shortages of ICU beds, ventilators, ECMO machines, dialysis, blood, convalescent plasma, staff!



## How Health Care Resources are Allocated

- Solid organs (from deceased donors) provide a helpful example to thinking about allocation, with many years of experience
- Kidney: a modified waiting list, which works since there is dialysis to bridge patients, often for years
  - Allocation is a version of first come first served
  - A pure waiting list approach represents prioritization of justice as an EQUAL chance, without consideration of how sick (which would be Justice as EQUITY) or what would be most EFFICIENT, in this case something like most life years predicted for the organ



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