Final Essay Assignment: Ethics and COVID-19

Biomedical Ethics

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Should everyone get vaccinated against COVID-19, and should it be mandatory? Soon, those questions are coming up because the distribution of the vaccine is not far off, and some hospitals are starting to vaccinate their staff in the next few weeks. After them, the vaccine is being offered to various others, including the general population who has expected it for a longtime with the acceptance of a few. Most individuals are responsible enough to see the necessity for a drug which keeps them safe against a dangerous virus without being forced by governmental authorities to mandatory vaccinations. Instead, governments should appeal on their citizens’ conscious and obligation for each other to get themselves vaccinated, but in conjunction with their free will to do so. No vaccine was available for the Spanish influenza and millions died because scientists did not have the knowledge in 1918 to produce an efficient vaccine which could have saved many lives. Medical science needed much more improvements before it could come even closely to the knowledge of today. We should feel privileged that we have access to modern drugs, which also includes vaccines, without being an adversary against them. Therefore, I am arguing for the administration of a vaccine against COVID-19, but governments should not mandate their population to take it. Everyone should decide for themselves to make a good moral choice on saving their lives and those of others.

Since a year COVID-19 is with us and the hope for relief seemed to be out of reach, until the news of a vaccine was being reported from different sources. Finally, science made a breakthrough, and several pharmaceutical companies are trying to get their vaccine on the market after being approved by health authorities. To get permission for a new drug or vaccine, extensive research and money must be invested because the ingredients and testing of it takes careful consideration and time. Rules and regulations must be followed like taking consent from test candidates who are being screened if they are suitable for the trial on testing the new vaccine or drug. Those trials can go over several months or years to achieve the best and safest result because the new medication should not harm anyone. In the case of COVID-19, the research and testing went over seven-month time, and it was approved by an emergency order which was allowed without any hesitation.

The goal of the scientists is to develop a safe vaccine which is without major side effects on the human body. To achieve that several trials had to be run where test subjects were chosen to try the drug in its experimental stage before it would be approved for public use. Animal testing had to be done also which is not ethical in everyone’s opinion, but it was a necessary move in the case of COVID-19. Human testing alone was not possible because the regulations for animal and human subjects are quite different and require permission which comes from separate authorities. This is the reason why animal testing in research projects is extensive, and animals can be used in a much larger capacity than humans which will continue in the future, if science wants to make progress. At least, if everybody gets vaccinated, those sacrifices were not unnecessary and makes animal research more acceptable in the public eye.

Who should have priority to receive the vaccine? Like already mentioned, hospitals are starting to vaccinate their staff in the next couple of weeks which is very fortune. The priority level for those workers is high because they are the ones who are most vulnerable to the virus. On a daily base, patients are being delivered into the hospitals and exposing everyone who treats them to the deadly virus with no more protection except their Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Those individuals are working until the point of exhaustion and no relief seem to be insight until the vaccine was released. This vaccine is not only a protection for themselves, but also protects others from them like their families at home. Their loved ones at home are the backbone of these workers because they rely on them for comfort and encouragement to get through this pandemic. Nobody wants to be responsible for the exposure of their families at home which also involves children and the elderly.

Many of our elderly, who are suffering from the virus, have secondary conditions like heart and lung diseases which are weaken the immune system and making the older person more vulnerable against the virus. Crowded conditions in retirement homes do not give any relief either because social distancing in those places is almost impossible and makes the situation not easier. Overworked personal is trying to care for sick and disabled older people to the same time and are being exposed to the virus in the same manner as staff in hospitals. Before COVID-19, workers of retirement homes had already a high turnover because of long hours, to many residents, and low wages which did not improve during the pandemic. A much-needed relief is necessary for them and should make them eligible like hospital workers to receive the vaccine.

Most children have a good immune system against the virus in contrast to the elderly and the rest of the general population which could make them an ideal candidate for the vaccine. The side effects of the vaccine would be less intensive on them because their immune system is less vulnerable, but the dosage must be adjusted according to their lesser weight. It is understandable, if parents are concerned of getting their children vaccinated because parents are always worried about their children. Natural parental instincts want us to protect our children from harm which could include a new vaccine that is tested, but still must prove, if it works. Not only parents but everyone else should consult their physician if doubt is crossing their mind over the vaccination. On the other hand, we should feel privileged that we live today, and vaccine is available for our disposal like Measle, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) vaccination. A harmless child disease which can have terrible consequences for pregnant women and their babies by developing birth defects during the first trimester.

One of the deadliest pandemics occurred in 1918, the Spanish influenza which took millions to their grave and was triggered by a deadly virus. World War I was raging, and troops had to be moved from one country to another, and so the virus was spreading around the globe very rapidly. Through fighting and malnutrition, soldiers were weakened, and their immune system had no chance against the disease. Soldiers lived close in the trenches together, shared space and items of daily living which was considered normal in a situation of life on the front line. On the European continent, the civilian population was deprived of food through extensive military blockades which helped the virus to claim more victims because not enough food means not enough nutrients for the body and its systems. Nobody knew where the influenza came from and how to fight it, so the spreading continued until 1920. Later, authorities were blamed of not being more cautious during the pandemic which cost so many lives like the casualties of the fighting during the war.

Developing a vaccine during a war is not a governments priority since its whole money is tied up in supporting the war effort. During World War I, this was exactly the case which left not many financial resources for anything else, specially not for research which was not seen as beneficiary to defeat and destroy the enemy. After the war, finances were used to build up the economy in countries which were left in ruins by political turmoil and conflict. Of course, this left no resources for vaccine research or any other relief to fight efficiently the Spanish influenza. Today, we see it as our moral obligation to do something against a pandemic despite of being involved internationally in military conflicts. Scientific knowledge has also developed a great deal over the past one hundred years and enabled our scientists to develop a vaccine in a period of a short time. We should be grateful for such a gift and not condemning its existence which can save many lives.

Should the government be involved in mandating vaccinations? Not because making it mandatory would take away a significant part of a citizen’s freedom and rights. Instead, authorities should appeal on individuals’ rational mind and their capability of reasoning to find out which way to go to make a good moral choice. In other words, people should decide on their own, if they want to get vaccinated which can protect them and their loved ones. Being responsible against oneself and others are choices which can be difficult because side effects of the vaccine are known but have not been experienced yet. Most individuals fear the unknown, specially, if it is injected into their body, and nobody knows how it is going to work or not. The guarantee that the vaccine is going to be efficient for the human body to be protected from the virus is to be seen. Experts hope, their research was enough, and the vaccine is a success which would eliminate many doubtful minds who were against it.

How can state and federal government convince their citizens to be vaccinated? First, citizens need to be informed about the vaccine’s components which contain elements to build antibodies against the virus, and so they can fight it with their own immune system. The question what is in it, bothers most people because they do not want to take something, they are not familiar with. If they have children, this question is important also because giving something which could be harmful to them, is in nobody’s interest. Second, the government need to inform about the availability and cost of the vaccination for the general population. Right now, it is accessible to healthcare workers and persons who are in high risk of getting the virus which can make a few people unruly why they are not receiving it earlier. Everyone, who wants to be vaccinated, must be patient and wait their turn on it because in the moment, there is not enough of it. The vaccination is to no cost for everybody who is willing to take it which is beneficial for the ones without insurance and access to adequate healthcare. The conclusion of those facts is to get vaccinated and do the right thing to protect oneself and others.