BIOETHICS & COVID-19

Angus Dawson
Sydney Health Ethics
Sydney School of Public Health
Marie Bashir Institute for Infectious Diseases and Biosecurity
What is ethics?

Focus on particular kinds of reasons

– Justificatory reasons are particularly important
– What we ought to do
– E.g. We should aim at just outcomes
What is Bioethics?

- Bio-ethics:
  1. Global ethics
  2. Public health ethics
  3. Clinical ethics
  4. Research ethics
  5. Link to environmental ethics
1. Global Ethics

A pandemic
Spread of disease – with a global focus

– Not just an outbreak
– Many different national responses
– Need coordinated action of national states
– International Health Regulations (2005)
2. Public Health Ethics

A focus on populations – not just individuals
Collective action – co-ordinated by the state

Role of state and public health:
- Protection
- Prevention
- Planning
2. Public Health Measures

- Surveillance
- Restrictions (quarantine, isolation, distancing, closing borders etc)
- Testing, contact tracing, follow up

- Not just liberty, privacy etc
2. Public Health Ethics: Impact

Distribution of benefits and burdens?
- Protect those at greatest risk: elderly, chronic disease

Making restrictions ‘liveable’
- Social, economic, mental health implications etc.

Making disadvantage worse?
- Migrants
- Prisons etc.
3. Clinical Ethics

Resource allocation: e.g. ventilators, intensive care beds

Options?

– Treat equally
– Produce best outcomes (efficiency)
– Priority to disadvantage
4. Research Ethics

Vaccines

Treatments

Faster approvals? How should we think about risk?
5. Link to Environmental Ethics

- SARS-CoV-2 – origins and One Health

- How should we balance health and economic considerations?

- How should we think of the issues of intergenerational justice?

- Can we learn lessons for the future from environmental gains from the restrictions?
Conclusions

SARS-CoV-2 virus is not just a big outbreak
- Transform all of our lives
- Our capacity to respond is not equal
- Concern for others
- Growth in solidarity

Bioethics – a broad field
Focus on conditions for flourishing lives

Many bioethical questions to discuss