Ethical Governance during Covid-19: The United Kingdom experience

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Responding to pandemic influenza
The ethical framework for policy and planning

Good Decision Making

Equal Concern and Respect
- Voice and Choice
- Minimising Harm
- Fairness
- Working Together
- Flexibility
- Keeping Things In Proportion
- Reciprocity

2007
Nuffield Council on Bioethics

- Ethical considerations on public health measures
- Democratic government
  - show us what you are doing,
  - set out your ethical approach,
  - explain how decisions are reached,
  - invite a broad range of voices to contribute, and
  - think ahead
- need for national guidance on resource allocation
  - authoritative, clear, definite, robust, transparent, fair, credible and consistent
Assessing whether Covid-19 patients will benefit from critical care: an objective approach to capacity challenges

- Political Concerns
- Ethical Disagreements
- Legal Risks
Moral and Ethical Advisory Group

• Bioethicists, regulators and community groups leaders
• Adopted the previous ethical framework but no public facing statements
• Confidential advice on issues including
  – Covid status certification,
  – risk stratification and ‘shielding’
  – attendance at funerals
  – vaccine hesitancy
Moral and Ethical Advisory Group: benefits

• Early discussion
• Identifying range of issues (less easy to pin down recommendations)
• Supplement to decision-making bodies
  – National Screening Committee
• Does not absolve decision-makers of their ethical responsibility
Distributed Governance

• Vaccine Prioritisation
  – Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation

• Human Challenge Trials
  – Health Research Authority

• Contact Tracing apps
  – Ethics Advisory Board
Features of the Ethics Advisory Board on contact tracing app

• Data ethicists and bioethicists
• How to do it ethically not whether fundamentally unethical
• Conditional advice
  – what needed to be demonstrated for the ethical case to be satisfied
• Timely advice
  – Letter of 24 April
  – Email on apple/google approach
Reflections on the UK experience

1. From ethical frameworks to pragmatic solutions
2. Bioethics as rules v morally responsible decision-makers
3. Real-time accountability
4. Developing principles and rapid decisions
5. Legitimate public pronouncements or trusted confidential advisors

Thank You for Listening