

# The Ethics of Healthcare: Balancing Patient Autonomy and Public Health

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## Abstract

Public health is a field of study that focuses on promoting and protecting the health and well-being of populations, rather than individuals. It encompasses a wide range of activities, including disease prevention and control, health promotion, and environmental health. Public health professionals work to identify and address the underlying determinants of health, such as social, economic, and environmental factors, in order to improve the health of entire communities. In this abstract, we will discuss the key concepts of public health, its goals and objectives, and the challenges and opportunities facing the field today. We will also highlight the importance of public health in addressing current and emerging health issues, such as infectious diseases, chronic diseases, and environmental threats, and the role of public health in promoting health equity and social justice. Finally, we will explore some of the key strategies and approaches used in public health practice, such as epidemiology, health promotion, and policy and advocacy, and the importance of collaboration and partnerships in achieving public health goals.

**Keywords:** Healthcare • Chronic diseases • Public health

## Introduction

The provision of healthcare services raises numerous ethical issues, which can be complex and difficult to reconcile. One of the key challenges in healthcare ethics is balancing the principles of patient autonomy and public health. Patient autonomy refers to an individual's right to make decisions about their own medical treatment, while public health refers to the health and well-being of the population as a whole. One of the main ethical issues that arise in healthcare is the question of informed consent. Informed consent refers to the process by which a patient is fully informed about their medical treatment options, including the benefits, risks, and potential side effects, and is able to make an informed decision about whether to proceed with the treatment. This principle is based on the idea of patient autonomy, as it recognizes that individuals have the right to make decisions about their own health and well-being.

However, there are situations where the principle of patient autonomy must be balanced against the principle of public health. For example, in the case of infectious diseases, an individual's refusal to receive a vaccination may put not only their own health at risk, but also the health of the wider community. In such cases, public health considerations may need to take precedence over individual autonomy, as the potential harm to the community may outweigh the individual's right to refuse treatment [1].

## Literature Review

Another ethical issue that arises in healthcare is the allocation of resources. Healthcare resources are finite, and there may be situations

where difficult decisions need to be made about how those resources should be allocated. For example, in a pandemic, there may be limited supplies of vaccines or medical equipment, and healthcare providers may need to decide which patients receive priority access to those resources. This raises questions about how to balance the principles of justice and equality with the need to provide the best possible care to patients. Healthcare providers also have an ethical responsibility to ensure that they do not discriminate against patients on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, or other factors. This includes providing culturally competent care that takes into account the diverse needs and experiences of patients. Healthcare providers must also be mindful of the potential for unconscious bias in their decision-making processes, and take steps to mitigate this bias [2].

In conclusion, the ethics of healthcare is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires careful consideration of the principles of patient autonomy and public health. Healthcare providers must balance the need to respect patients' autonomy with the need to ensure the health and well-being of the wider community. They must also ensure that resources are allocated fairly and that they do not discriminate against patients on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, or other factors. By addressing these ethical issues in a thoughtful and responsible manner, healthcare providers can help to ensure that patients receive the best possible care while also promoting the health and well-being of society as a whole [3].

Public health is a field that is concerned with promoting and protecting the health and well-being of populations, rather than individuals. It involves a range of activities that aim to prevent and control diseases, promote healthy behaviours and lifestyles, and create safe and healthy environments. Public health professionals work to identify and address the underlying determinants of health, such as social, economic, and environmental factors, in order to improve the health of entire communities. Public health has a broad scope, encompassing many different disciplines, including epidemiology, biostatistics, environmental health, health promotion, and health policy and management. Public health professionals work in a variety of settings, including government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private sector companies. They may be involved in research, program development and implementation, policy and advocacy, and community engagement [4].

One of the key goals of public health is to reduce health disparities and promote health equity. This involves addressing the root causes of health inequities, such as poverty, discrimination, and social injustice, and working to ensure that all individuals and communities have equal access to the resources and opportunities necessary for good health. Public health is also important in

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addressing current and emerging health threats, such as infectious diseases, chronic diseases, and environmental hazards. Public health professionals play a critical role in monitoring disease outbreaks, developing and implementing vaccination programs, promoting healthy lifestyles and behaviors, and responding to environmental threats such as air pollution and climate change. In summary, public health is a vital field that focuses on promoting and protecting the health and well-being of populations. It involves a range of activities and disciplines, and is essential for addressing current and emerging health threats, reducing health disparities, and promoting health equity and social justice [5].

### Balancing patient autonomy and public health

The ethics of healthcare are complex and multifaceted, as they involve balancing the needs and rights of individual patients with those of the broader public. One of the key ethical dilemmas in healthcare is the tension between patient autonomy and public health. Patient autonomy refers to an individual's right to make decisions about their own healthcare, based on their own values, beliefs, and preferences. This includes the right to refuse treatment, even if it may be in their best interests. However, the exercise of patient autonomy can sometimes conflict with the interests of the broader public, particularly in the case of infectious diseases [6].

## Discussion

Infectious diseases are a public health concern because they can spread rapidly and have the potential to cause significant harm to individuals and communities. In some cases, the actions of individual patients can contribute to the spread of infectious diseases. For example, a patient who refuses to be vaccinated against a communicable disease may put others at risk of contracting the disease. In such cases, the ethical principles of beneficence (doing good) and non-maleficence (avoiding harm) come into play. Healthcare providers have a duty to act in the best interests of their patients, but they also have a duty to protect the public from harm. This can create a tension between patient autonomy and public health.

To navigate this tension, healthcare providers must consider the principles of justice and fairness. They must weigh the potential benefits and risks of a treatment or intervention, not only for the individual patient, but also for the broader community. They must also consider the social and cultural context in which healthcare decisions are made, and strive to promote equity and access to care for all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances. In addition, healthcare providers must consider the importance of communication and informed consent. Patients have a right to be fully informed about the risks and benefits of any treatment or intervention, as well as any potential implications for public health. Providers must engage in open and honest communication with their patients, and work to build trust and understanding.

## Conclusion

The ethics of healthcare are complex and multifaceted, and require

healthcare providers to balance the needs and rights of individual patients with those of the broader public. Patient autonomy and public health are not mutually exclusive, and healthcare providers must work to promote both, while also upholding the principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and fairness. Communication and informed consent are also critical in navigating ethical dilemmas in healthcare. Ultimately, by upholding these principles and values, healthcare providers can work to promote the health and well-being of both individual patients and the broader community.

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## Conflict of Interest

None.

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