

INTERDEPENDENCE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Importance of Interdependence During the COVID-19 Pandemic

By: Leanne Von Giese

Contact Information: lvongiese31@gmail.com

Daniel McIntyre Collegiate, Winnipeg

Supervising Teacher: Benjamin Paul

Word Count: 931

An emerging novel coronavirus has caused a drastic change in many of our lifestyles. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only presented numerous ethical dilemmas within our society, but between nations as well. Throughout history, research and science have been the foundation to defeating past pandemics. We have witnessed innovations created to revolutionize healthcare to how it is today, but research can only contribute so much when time is of utmost value. We are faced with a tragic reality, where country leaders are forced to make decisions to ensure the safety of their citizens despite being morally ambiguous. Thus, a question arises as to whether this “me first” mindset does more harm than good over time. In the past, we have seen the importance of interdependence between nations to recover from natural disaster. However, with how current nation representatives are handling the pandemic, it seems that we may be far from reaching the end goal. Consequently, ignoring the needs of interdependence between nations will prevent the global population from defeating the pandemic.

Vaccine nationalism is one of numerous ethical issues that have arisen amidst this pandemic. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the director general of the World Health Organization (WHO), describes this ideology as a “catastrophic moral failure.”¹ Wealthy, developed countries are able to reap the benefits of home-grown vaccines or are mass buying from pharmaceutical companies, while less fortunate nations are left behind. Inevitably, this principle has not been a new phenomenon as a similar response was administered during the H1N1 outbreak.² Some leaders argue that self priority is most important. The Trump Administration in 2020 had compared the COVID-19 outbreak to the deployment of oxygen

¹ Helen Lock, “Vaccine Nationalism: Everything You Need to Know,” *Global Citizen*, para. 2, (2021), accessed April 10, 2021, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/what-is-vaccine-nationalism/>

² Thomas J. Bollyky and Chad P. Bown, “The Tragedy of Vaccine Nationalism: Only Cooperation Can End the Pandemic,” *Asia Scotland Institute*, pg. 6, (2020), accessed April 10, 2021, <https://www.asiascot.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Tragedy-of-Vaccine-Nationalism--Foreign-Affairs.pdf>

masks on a plane³ – ensure that your own mask is safely put on, before helping anyone else. Accordingly, the United States had invested \$10 billion towards “Operation Warp Speed,” securing vaccines for all Americans.⁴

Although every citizen has the right to feel safe and prioritized within one’s own country, national vaccination does not erase the severity of the pandemic in many parts of the world. Referencing back to the oxygen mask analogy, Bollyky and Brown explain that the difference between that and the pandemic is that each individual on the plane has access to an oxygen mask, whereas vaccine resources are sparse in some places.⁵ Countries left behind on this vaccine race are forced to watch from the sidelines as restrictions slowly start to lift for those who are fortunate to have an early vaccine. While certain nations may revel in returning back to “normalcy,” life will cease to return to its previous state. The virus will continue to exist in many places, crumbling health care systems and exposing millions of vulnerable people to the disease. Undoubtedly, the goal of cooperation is in everyone’s best interest, yet we stray far away from it.

Prolonging this pandemic not only worsens pre-existing issues, but it continues to introduce a multitude of consequences that impact our daily lives. It is evident that countless lockdowns and isolation are not good for our mental health, relationships and education. However, complying to protocols to slow the spread of the virus is a sacrifice worth taking. Without countries having access to vaccine resources, the number of infected individuals will continue to surge. This not only puts stress on health care workers, but thousands of innocent lives will continue to be lost; an issue that could have been prevented if necessary precautions were taken. In some places, those in healthcare are faced with a decision of which patients get

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

priority for life-saving care. We had witnessed this heartbreaking reality in Italy, and it seems that Ontario and India are on pace to resort to a triage protocol as well.⁶

Inadvertently, the possibility of triage brings upon many ethical consequences to the already immense list. By resorting to this call, healthcare will be discriminating against those with disabilities to prioritize those with the best chance at survival.⁷ Conversely, despite being discussed as the solution to preventing worsening conditions of the pandemic, vaccine distribution still raises concerns to this day. While scientists have conducted extensive research to determine the efficacy of vaccinations, coercing individuals to get vaccinated would ultimately go against a person's autonomy and liberty. Every individual has the right for their religion and beliefs to be respected, but uncertainty emerges when values lead to the harm of another individual's health and safety. However, the pandemic has presented a persuasive argument that goes against one's belief. A collective effort must be made to control the spread of the virus. If the majority of the population is not vaccinated, the likelihood of contracting the virus will never decrease. Thus, achieving herd immunity through vaccinations protects others around us who are truly incapable of receiving a vaccine.

While coherence between nations has a major role in mediating the outcome of the pandemic, cooperation on all levels of society can prevent the situation from worsening. It is one thing to manage and implement regulations, but taking small sacrifices to follow these regulations go a long way. As the upcoming generation, we have the ability as youth to spark change. By seeking to understand the complexities and importance of interdependence, future

⁶ Zach Dubinsky, Terence McKenna, Joseph Loeiro and Albert Leung, "As ICUs Fill Up, Doctors Confront Grim Choice of Who Gets Lifesaving Care," *CBC News*, para. 3, (2021), accessed April 20, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/covid-ontario-icu-triage-1.5992188?cmp=rss>

⁷ Mildred Z. Solomon, Matthew K. Wynia and Lawrence O. Gostin, "COVID-19 Crisis Triage - Optimizing Health Outcomes and Disability Rights," *The New England Journal of Medicine*, para. 4, (2020), accessed April 20, 2021, <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2008300>

world leaders have the power to ensure we do not make the same mistakes again.

Acknowledging our social responsibility as humans both on the societal and federal level guarantees that not just individual countries are able to recover from the pandemic, but the global population collectively. After all, we are not just individuals governed by independent nations, but we are all equal as citizens of the world.

Bibliography

- Bollyky, Bown. “The Tragedy of Vaccine Nationalism: Only Cooperation Can End the Pandemic,” *Asia Scotland Institute*, (2020),
<https://www.asiascot.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Tragedy-of-Vaccine-Nationalism--Foreign-Affairs.pdf>
- Dubinsky, McKenna, Loeiro, Leung. “As ICUs Fill Up, Doctors Confront Grim Choice of Who Gets Lifesaving Care,” *CBC News*, (2021),
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/covid-ontario-icu-triage-1.5992188?cmp=rss>
- Lock. “Vaccine Nationalism: Everything You Need to Know.” *Global Citizen*, (2021),
<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/what-is-vaccine-nationalism/>
- Solomon, Wynia, Gostin, “COVID-19 Crisis Triage - Optimizing Health Outcomes and Disability Rights,” *The New England Journal of Medicine*, (2020),
<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2008300>