

The Ethical Link Between Morality and Mortality



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Relevancy of Available Facts

In the search of objective truth in regards to this case study, one must analyze the relevance of all available facts. What gives factual statements their relevance is their impending consequences on the world around us. As Charles faces turmoil over choosing a course of action, he must understand the gravity of the situation. In this context, the factors that are pertinent are: the duration of the trip is two weeks (from New Zealand to Australia), there are one hundred passengers aboard the yacht, and John is ill and has been in contact with other individuals who refuse to quarantine. Putting these facts into perspective will allow us to make an ethically sound decision. Measles is a highly contagious disease. Symptoms usually develop 10–12 days after exposure to an infected person and last 7–10 days (Gostin, 2015). Exposure to measles can result in ear infection, bronchitis, laryngitis, croup, pneumonia, encephalitis, and even pregnancy complications (Griffin, 2020). Through vaccination measles has not been a widespread disease in the United States for over a decade, however that is not the case in developing countries where vaccinations are not as readily available to the masses (Gostin, 2015). Those individuals living in developing countries, where measles is more common are at higher risk of catching the disease from travelers such as John.

Forming an Ethically Informed Decision

In this circumstance, a resolution can only be achieved through honest disclosure. Theoretically, the spread of measles to unvaccinated people poses a great threat — this is enough to warrant serious concern for those who may be in impending danger. This situation is riddled with conflicting opinions and incohesive actions. Charles must de-escalate the tension by respecting all opinions at play, however it must be explained to the twelve students that this concerns everyone aboard the yacht. Charles has a moral obligation to bear in mind the lives of

the vulnerable. The hierarchy of ethical principles identifies and ranks seven principles to abide by when making a decision, these principles (in their respective ranks from most important to least) include: preservation of life, equality, autonomy and freedom, least harm, quality of life, privacy/confidentiality, and truth/full-disclosure (Harrington & Dolgoff, 2008). If Charles strictly conforms to this list, he will reach a conscientious conclusion. The verdict is that Charles should report John's illness to the ship's medic in order to protect the vulnerable individuals from life endangering ailments, this course of action causes the least harm, implies that all lives are equal and worth protecting. This direction does not impair any individual's quality of life and ensures that the truth is being told. Ideally, Charles should inform the twelve students that he will report to the medic and aim to gain their consent.

Navigating Through Diverse Opinions

Indifference and neglect can result in more damage than dealing with opposing opinions. If left unchecked, the ramifications of contracting measles could be lethal. In this case, Charles lacks the authority to control the decisions of the twelve students. There is a paradox to power, being a chaperone gives Charles power — however that power must be used with integrity and respect. The more force you bring to a situation, the more likely you are to receive resistance. Those students who have been vaccinated are valid in their desire to enjoy their vacation, however until that information is confirmed by someone who is professionally licensed to clear them as “unharmful” to others they should remain in quarantine. The emotions of these individuals is understandable. If individuals are unable to contract the disease and unable to spread it, what justifies confining them? The answer is simple, responsibility. Are individuals going to hold themselves responsible in the case that someone becomes fatally ill or even dies?

Humans have a basic moral obligation to prevent harm to others if possible. Pleasure without conscience can be immoral and devious when the stakes are high.

Individuals are more inclined to abide by the law and behave within the realms of compassion when there is active surveillance that can hold them accountable for their actions. In predicaments where people have conflicting primal impulses, one being self-serving and the other altruistic — it is important that the correct impulse is cultivated. From a social-psychological perspective, when there are conflicting intrinsic motivators for a behavior or thought-process, shame and fear of a disgraceful reputation is often what drives people to do the morally “right” thing (Greene & Haidt, 2002). Regardless, the implementation of quarantining has always been feared and misunderstood in equal measure. That stems from the lack of equitable compensation and incorrect enforcement. Isolation should separate those with measles from those who are not sick. After the medic deciphers that, segregation between the two groups will occur. This split must be explained in a clear manner rooted in medical evidence. After quarantine begins, both the sick and the healthy must be given equal access to basic necessities. Though this manner of vacation may not be as enjoyable, if done correctly there will still be autonomy and freedom to enjoy sections of the yacht. This plan allows Charles to focus on consequences and outcome. By adopting a utilitarian approach, Charles can justify his decision to report to the medic by focusing on the beneficence that his decision would result in, as well as minimizing the risk of harm.

In a dilemma like this, someone must inevitably sacrifice. This is a very old story and there is no other version. Will Charles sacrifice the leisure of others or will he sacrifice the physical well-being of others? The magnitude between the two options are stark. There is no

oscillating between gratification and the pain of enduring an infectious disease — if humanity exists, the decision has made itself.

References

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