

Review of: "Relevance of Medical Ethics in Public Health: Case Study of Polio Eradication"

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The paper is of great interest as it combines a specific medical-scientific analysis, such as the question of which vaccination is clinically most suitable against infantile poliomyelitis, with the inevitable ethical implications that such a problem poses.

The text clearly highlights the fact that often, from the perspective of international bioethics and biomedicine, matters concerning public ethics are considered of little interest. The polio vaccination is a matter of public ethics, and in fact, the conclusion that the authors reach, with precise and accurate data, is that the ethical issues surrounding such vaccinations are of little interest in public debate.

It should be noted that, unlike the cases examined in the text, in European national contexts, when public health interventions do not involve interpersonal transactions or pharmaceutical products, they are still relevant, both as "public" ethical issues and as bioethically relevant issues in the lives of the people whose health and lives are at stake.

The authors draw attention to the fact that their paper aims to benefit a class of vulnerable subjects, such as children. In Italy, for example, every clinical decision must always be made in the best interest of the minor. It does not matter how the intervention is qualified, whether it is declared "public ethics" or not.

The paper also has the merit of highlighting a serious misconception underlying the analyzed problem, both in the topic of vaccines and in other bioethical issues: the most economically convenient choice is not necessarily the ethically appropriate one! If a prescription for a drug, diagnostic test, or vaccine is considered approvable only because it is economically more advantageous than other competing options, it does not necessarily make it an ethical choice.

On the contrary, if the choice is dictated by cost-effectiveness or if drugs/vaccines are offered which are not safer or less effective than other available options (in terms of number of adverse events, side effects, safety of administration, etc.), this violates (public) medical ethics, as well as the specific ethical rules of healthcare professionals. Furthermore, the ethical rules cited by the authors, which must always be followed, are precisely those affirmed with greater incisiveness and clarity in The International Code of Medical Ethics of the World Medical Association, published in Berlin in October 2022.

These prescriptions are very clear and better received by scholars and clinicians working in legal systems where health is a right, sometimes even constitutionally protected, while they are a very difficult reflection for those living and working in legal systems that do not have this rule.

The paper therefore has the merit of broadening the discussion, highlighting the role that health, understood as a right, and in particular the health of children, should have.

Just two suggestions: it would be preferable to mention the most recent edition of Childress and Beauchamp: Beauchamp, T.L. and Childress, J.F. (2013) Principles of Biomedical Ethics. 8th Edition, Oxford University Press, New York, 2013 and it would be appropriate to reference the 2022 Biomedical Ethics Code (The International Code of Medical Ethics of the World Medical Association Berlin, 2022).

Anyway, excellent work!