



Enacting Bioethics

Graeme T. Laurie¹

Published online: 29 July 2020

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The original articles in this September 2020 issue of the *Asian Bioethics Review* demonstrate very well the range and diversity of contributions that arise from the field of bioethics. For example, if we were to consider these three articles from the perspective of analysis of the action of the actors involved, then we have three very different types of insights. Doan et al. (2020) provide a fascinating account of the cultural, social and ethical factors in Vietnam that likely drive a desire for post-mortem reproduction among the citizenry in that country, arguing for more overt, permissive regulation of the practice as a result. In contrast, Tsuruwaka et al. (2020) offer qualitative evidence of the attitudes and approaches of healthcare professionals in Japan when approaching the delicate matter of advance care planning (ACP). The evidence shows a range of ‘trigger’ events to communication about ACP, ranging from almost exclusively clinical factors to concerns about promoting patients’ autonomy. As to the latter, the authors suggest that there are many valuable lessons to be learned about improving patient-centred care as a result. Finally, Du et al. (2020) offer a different kind of qualitative analysis relating to press presentation in China of the issue of gene patenting. This globally controversial issue continues to raise profound ethical questions not only about the propriety of granting intellectual property rights (IPRs) over ‘living material’ but also about the ways in which IPRs might be exercised to restrict access to diagnostics and treatments, raising questions of justice and exploitation, among many others. And yet, as the work of Du et al. demonstrates, the Chinese press is largely uncritical of the practice of gene patenting. This raises important questions of even broader reach about the role and responsibility of the press more generally, not only in China but also across the globe, and not only about patenting but also about all social issues giving rise to bioethical concern. As a final point about these original articles, it is also helpful to note how the research methods employed by these authors could equally be transposed between their respective topics, thus a qualitative analysis of citizens’ attitudes towards post-mortem reproduction would generate evidence that could inform future policy and law reform, while deeper analysis from justice and from autonomy could build on the qualitative contributions herein about approaches to ACP

✉ Graeme T. Laurie
Graeme.Laurie@ed.ac.uk

¹ Edinburgh Law School, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

or the patenting of living material. We encourage future contributions of this kind to explore such possibilities.

The Perspectives section of this issue is unapologetically dominated by contributions addressing the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. The editorial team is very encouraged by the strong response to our call for papers on ethical responses to COVID-19, and an important strand of analysis is emerging from the contributions: this concerns assessments of various countries' (in)action in the face of the crisis. Moving forward, we will seek to capture and publish as broad a range of country perspectives as possible.

In this issue, our COVID-19 perspectives begin with an account and analysis of the Italian professional response to scarce resources, provided by Craxì et al. (2020). At the time this article was written, Italy was at the European epicentre of the pandemic, and while matters have moved on considerably since then, the authors aspire to offer insights into resource allocation from which other countries might learn. In a similar vein, de Castro-Hamoy and de Castro (2020) alert us to the ever-present threat of ageism in scarce resource allocation, and they bring helpful analysis of the ethical concerns to the current COVID-19 context.

Turning to country responses, our final two COVID-19 papers offer examples of tentative success and on-going challenges in managing the outbreak. Thus, reflecting the apparent success story of Vietnam which—to date—has no reported deaths from COVID-19, Ivic (2020) offers possible explanations about the Vietnamese response, justifying these by reference to a broad societal ethical commitment to an ethic of care, emphasising collective responsibility and community solidarity. In contrast, Yusof et al. (2020) alert us to the dangers and vagaries of using social media to spread information about the virus within the wider society. Using the example of Malaysia, the authors highlight two ways in which irresponsible uses of social media can give rise to a host of ethical concerns, namely, using these media to share personal information about likely COVID-19-infected persons and the ever-present—and sadly increasing—phenomenon of fake news. To address this, the authors offer an ethically grounded strategy both for Malaysia and for other countries facing similar concerns.

In many ways, the final perspective paper in the September issue reflects many elements of the papers above. In their examination of the role of HealthServe—a non-profit organisation in Singapore that defends and promotes the rights of migrant workers—Rajaraman et al. (2020) offer inside insights into the workings of this organisation as actors themselves seeking to promote a public good for structurally disadvantaged groups. Despite legal entitlement to access to the Universal Health Coverage system in Singapore, the authors demonstrate well how epistemic and structural factors lead to significant problems of access and serious concerns about equity, justice and a lack of solidarity. Arguably, it was precisely these kinds of ethical failures that led to Singapore's COVID-19 spike in April 2020 (Koh 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic must not obscure or eclipse longer-standing matters of bioethical concern or global ethical crisis. The *Asian Bioethics Review* welcomes all contributions on these issues, and no contribution of quality has been, nor will be, excluded from this journal for the sake of wider discussion of COVID-19. By the same token, to the extent that this journal can continue to capture and publicise commentary on the ethical responses of countries to this pandemic, we will strive to do so. The

editorial team believes that the journal provides a valuable resource in this regard, for now, for the future and for the annals of public health history.

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