

April 1996

HIV and AIDS Related Ethical Principles

Ethical principles that should
guide the international,
national, community and
individual response to
HIV/AIDS

Compassion

Compassion requires that people respond to the suffering of others, including those with HIV/AIDS, with sympathy, mercy and a willingness to help.

Solidarity

Solidarity requires that people come together to respond to the suffering, as well as the injustice, caused by HIV/AIDS,

Responsibility

Responsibility means that every individual, community, institution and nation must act responsibly towards HIV/AIDS to prevent its spread and to care for those infected and otherwise affected.

Tolerance

Tolerance requires respect for the equal worth, dignity and autonomy of people affected by HIV/AIDS, including those with different beliefs, opinions, and life styles.

Information

All individuals and communities should have available to them the information necessary to make good and necessary decisions about their health, including how to avoid HIV infection with HIV/AIDS and how to cope with its consequences.

Empowerment

All people should have the ability to protect themselves from infection by being able to refuse unsafe sex and to cope with HIV/AIDS if they or someone in their family is infected.

Ethical principles that should guide policy formulation and implementation in HIV/AIDS health policy.

Well-being/Beneficence

HIV/AIDS policies should be designed for the general good, and the benefits of the proposed policy should be weighed against the harms. There should be no infliction of harm on people, including those living with HIV/AIDS or suspected of it.

Equity/Distributive Justice

The burdens and benefits of HIV/AIDS policy should be distributed equitably among the population. No groups or individuals should be discriminated against in the context of HIV/AIDS. All people and groups should be treated fairly and equally and have equal access to available information, prevention methods, treatment and research results.

Respect for Persons

Individuals have the capacity and right to make choices and decisions about their bodies, personal integrity, and actions as long as do not diminish rights of others. Aid should be free from unjustified interference by others, including in the context of HIV/AIDS. People of diminished autonomy who are dependent or vulnerable should be protected against harm or abuse.

Confidentiality

People have a right to keep confidential any information which is highly personal and the divulgence of which could be detrimental for them, including information about their HIV/AIDS status. Professional ethics requires that professionals (lawyers, health care workers, insurance, social workers) maintain strict confidentiality concerning all personal information obtained from clients in the context of their professional work.

Obligation to treat

Medical ethics requires that health professionals must treat, to the best of their ability, all persons seeking their medical attention without discrimination and without prejudice based on the origin or nature of the patient's illness, including HIV/AIDS.

Informed Consent

Respect for the integrity and autonomy of the individual means that informed consent should be obtained before the administration of medical tests, drugs, treatment or participation in research, including those that are related to HIV/AIDS.

Elements of Informed Consent

The individual must be a competent individual who has the capacity to make decisions. S/he must have received all necessary information, and arrived at a decision without coercion, inducement or intimidation. If s/he does not have capacity to give free consent, s/he should be protected by supplementary measures or authorized representatives.

Information Essential to Informed Consent

Information concerning HIV/AIDS testing, treatment and research should be explained in a language the individual will understand. All benefits/risks/problems/alternatives should be fully explained. No information should be withheld that would cause a reasonable person to refuse. The person should understand that they are free to refuse and/or withdraw at any time

without penalty. The degree to which confidentiality can be maintained should also be explained to the person.

General sources and further reading :

"Declaration at Dakar", UNDP, 1994;

International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical
Research
Involving Human Subjects, CIONS, 1993;

"The Rights and Humanity Declaration and
Charter on HIV/AIDS",
Rights and Humanity, 1992.

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