

# **Can we avoid mistakes from the past in responding to future epidemics?**

**The Ethics of a Pandemic – Hindsight and Foresight**

Swedish National Council on Medical Ethics

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*"I just want to apologize beforehand if you miss."*

CN  
COLLECTION

# Albert Camus: The Plague

- Everybody knows that pestilences have a way of recurring in the world; yet somehow we find it hard to believe in one's that crash down on our heads from the blue sky.
- There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise.

The  
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Panel

FOR PANDEMIC  
PREPAREDNESS  
& RESPONSE



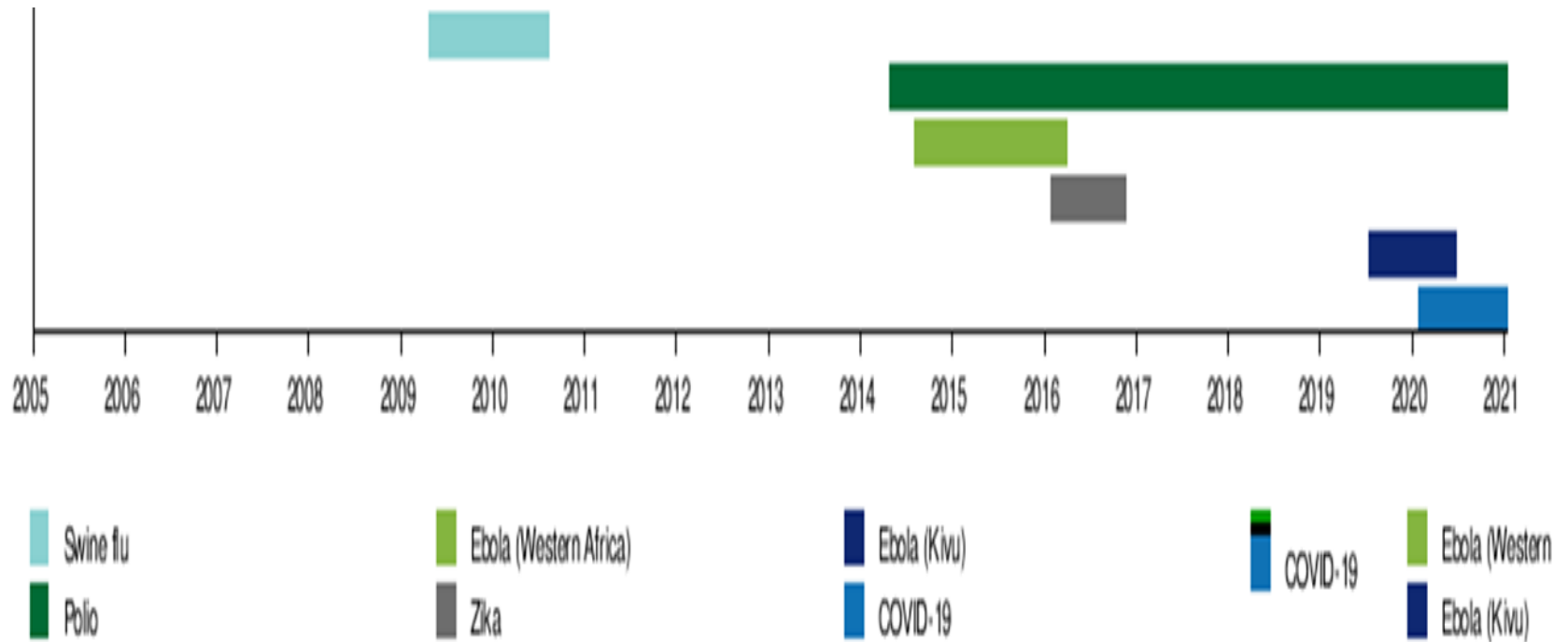
# COVID-19: Make it the Last Pandemic

## A Summary

- But the world cannot afford to focus only on COVID-19. It must learn from this crisis, and plan for the next one. Otherwise, precious time and momentum will be lost. That is why our recommendations focus on the future. **COVID-19 has been a terrible wake-up call.** So now the world needs to wake up and commit to clear targets, additional resources, new measures and strong leadership to prepare for the future.
- We have been warned

- Sirleaf said: “The situation we find ourselves in today could have been prevented. An outbreak of a new pathogen, Sars CoV-2 became a catastrophic pandemic that has now killed more than 3.25 million people, and continues to threaten lives and livelihoods all over the world. It is due to a myriad of failures, gaps and delays in preparedness and response. This was partly due **to failure to learn from the past.**”

A Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) is the loudest alarm that can be sounded by the WHO Director-General.



The most important lesson we must learn from this Ebola outbreak regards our inability to learn lessons from past outbreaks. We have hit the snooze button repeatedly and ‘learn’ the lessons all over again when the next outbreak emerges. **We either have collective amnesia or collective narcolepsy.**

## Most powerful lesson from Ebola: We do not learn our lessons

BY MAXWELL J. SMITH AND ROSS E.G. UPSHUR

DECEMBER 11TH 2015

‘E bola is a wake-up call.’

This is a common [sentiment](#) expressed by those who have reflected on the ongoing Ebola outbreak in



1. We must learn to prepare adequately based on previous experience
2. We must learn to better articulate and prioritize overarching goals
3. We must learn to work collaboratively
4. We must learn to protect the most vulnerable individuals and populations
5. We must learn to improve communication



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OPEN LETTER

**Top five ethical lessons of COVID-19 that the world must learn [version 1; peer review: 2 approved]**

[✉](#) Maxwell J. Smith [ORCID](#)<sup>1</sup>, Aasim Ahmad<sup>2</sup>, Thalia Arawi<sup>3</sup>, Angus Dawson<sup>4</sup>, Ezekiel J. Emanuel<sup>5</sup>, T. Garani-Papadatos<sup>6</sup>, Prakash Ghimire<sup>7</sup>, Zubairu Iliyasu [ORCID](#)<sup>8</sup>, Ruipeng Lei<sup>9</sup>, Ignacio Mastroleo [ORCID](#)<sup>10</sup>, Roli Mathur<sup>11</sup>, Joseph Okeibunor [ORCID](#)<sup>12</sup>, Michael Parker [ORCID](#)<sup>13</sup>, Carla Saenz<sup>14</sup>, Beatriz Thomé [ORCID](#)<sup>15</sup>, Ross E.G. Upshur [ORCID](#)<sup>16</sup>, Teck Chuan Voo [ORCID](#)<sup>17</sup>

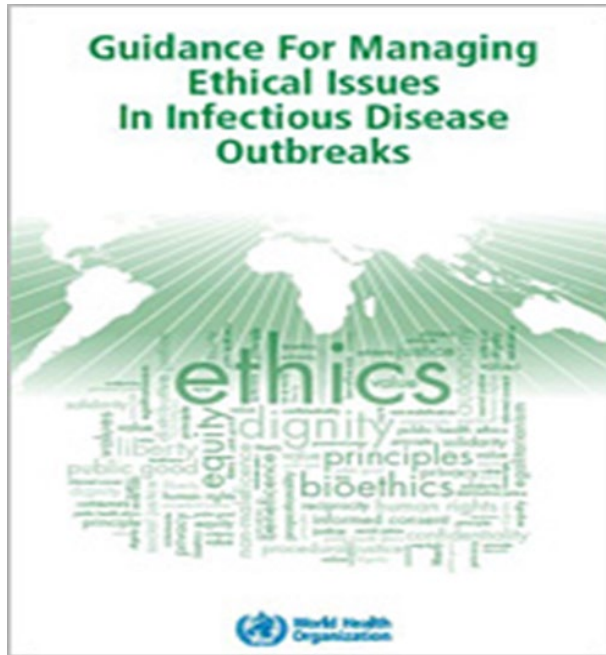
# Pandemic Playbook

## **Pandemic/Epidemic Event**

1. High early morbidity and mortality in HCP's and caregivers
2. High levels of uncertainty/lack of evidence
3. Need for public health measures to contain spread
4. Facing scarcity
5. Structural Inequity (local and global)

## **Associated Ethical Issues**

1. Duty to care/duty to protect
2. Research ethics, pandemic exceptionalism
3. Public health ethics/justification of restrictions (masks, vaccines, quarantine)
4. Resource allocation/priority setting (Vaccines, Therapeutics, Diagnostics)
5. Public/Global health ethics: solidarity, equity, reciprocity



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# Perspective

## What Covid Has Taught the World about Ethics

Ezekiel J. Emanuel, M.D., Ph.D., Ross E.G. Upshur, M.D., and Maxwell J. Smith, Ph.D.

# Point at Which Values Enter into Pandemic Decision Making

- When explicitly invoking values
- When establishing policy objectives
- When navigating trade-offs
- When navigating uncertainty

# When explicitly invoking values

- Equity, fairness, solidarity, trust, security, and transparency are all examples of values explicitly invoked by decision makers.
- Values reflect judgments about what is important or of worth, which can form the basis for ethical action. Ethics involves the systematic study of the values that do, or ought to, underpin choices in pandemic response.

# When establishing policy objectives

- Because policy objectives reflect judgments about what is important or of worth, they are closely linked with values, even if that link is not always made explicit. Science alone cannot tell us which objectives are important or of worth; value judgments are required.

# When navigating trade-offs

- When two or more objectives come into conflict, values come into conflict. Decision makers must determine how much weight to give certain values and assess whether the promotion of one or more values should be traded off against the promotion of other values.



# When navigating uncertainty

- When decisions must be made in the context of uncertainty, they may turn out to be wrong. Values inform the weight we attach to the consequences of these possible errors and our judgments about how much risk to accept.

# Whither ethics?

- Despite complaints, research ethics guidance well established
- Need better translation of ethics playbook into pandemic response (topic absent in Independent Panel Report)
- Learn from knowledge translation and implementation science
- Better use of health communications/social media
- Better preparation and training of health professionals
- Closer links between policy makers, science advisors and communications offices (Boot camps? Intensive Courses?)

# Conclusion

- Ethical issues constitutive and unavoidable in public health emergencies but poorly integrated into response
- Abundant research and guidance on all elements of the pandemic playbook
- For the most part, ethical issues not recognized as such and therefore not addressed
- Eternal challenges: allocation and priority setting, equity and justice