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**Life vs. Life
Moral Dilemmas in Allocation of Scarce Medical
Resources**

Summary

The book 'Life vs. Life. Moral Dilemmas in Allocation of Scarce Medical Resources' presents theories, practices, and empirical data related to moral judgment in situations of allocation of scarce medical resources. Ethical issues related to that topic are the focus of this book and are examined from a variety of perspectives – those of philosophy, bioethics and medical ethics, and psychology. The emphasis of the book is on empirical studies that examine the attitudes and perceptions of ordinary people who are not specialists or experts in medical ethics. The author's empirical studies examining moral judgment in dilemma situations related to the allocation of scarce medical resources are also presented. The results could help to establish topics for debate and to aim for consensus between theoretical principles, the pursuit for maximum effective use of available resources, and the attitudes of the public. The author's belief in the importance of such discussions on the topic is embedded in the structure and content of this book, which presents various moral aspects of the problem of allocation of scarce medical resources.

The book consists of an introduction, 12 chapters, and a conclusion, as well as a list of 156 references. The main body of the book is structured in three parts.

In Part I, the issue of allocation of scarce medical resources is explored from a theoretical perspective. Chapter 1 examines the main ethical theories related to distributive justice - utilitarianism, deontology, egalitarianism, theory of rights, justice as fairness, principlism, contractualism. Chapter 2 presents various perspectives from the field of bioethics on what principles and criteria should be applied when allocating scarce medical resources, and examines both arguments and counterarguments regarding these principles and criteria. Chapter 3 presents some of the debate topics related to the allocation of scarce medical resources.

Part II examines medical practices and guidelines for allocation of scarce medical resources in various countries. Chapter 4 presents ethical principles underlying medical standards and guidelines for the allocation of medical resources. Chapter 5 examines ethical principles embedded in these medical standards and guidelines adopted in several countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 6 examines the debate and the practices regarding withholding and withdrawing of life-sustaining treatment.

Part III presents psychological research in the area of moral judgment in the allocation of medical resources. Chapter 7 presents the main research questions and results in the

literature on the topic, presentic research done using both hypothetical and realistic moral dilemmas. The following chapters present four of the author's studies that examine moral judgment in dilemma situations where there is a conflict between utilitarian rules and the order of patient care. Possible solutions are based on both different utilitarian criteria (higher probability of recovery, longer life expectancy, higher quality of life) and egalitarian rules ('first come, first served' or random allocation). Data from 585 participants are presented – 471 participants from Bulgaria and 114 participants from the USA.

Chapter 8 presents research exploring the question of how people judge utilitarian rules for allocating scarce medical resources versus the two egalitarian rules (first-come, first-served and random allocation) if they are presented as possible alternatives in one and the same dilemma. Moral dilemmas used were describing situations related to COVID-19 when there is need for triage due to scarce medical resources.

Chapter 9 presents research exploring further the theme of moral judgment in situations requiring allocation of scarce medical resources. Again, the focus is on moral judgment in terms of support for utilitarian and egalitarian ethical principles, but in addition attitudes towards the reallocation of medical resources are also explored. One of the goals of this research is also to use the natural course of the pandemic as a manipulation towards using the 'veil of ignorance'.

Chapter 10 once again examines moral judgment in situations involving scarce life-saving medical resources. The possible choices in the dilemmas contrast various utilitarian and egalitarian rules. What is new in this study is that the type of the scarce medical resource to be allocated is varied. Various formulations of the possibility of random selection have also been explored.

In Chapter 11, moral judgment is also explored in situations where the participants have no personal experience. Another goal of this research is to check if the results obtained are specific to the Bulgarian culture and whether similar effects will be observed for participants from another culture (USA).

Chapter 12 presents a summary of the results of the empirical studies presented. The main results of the author's series of studies are that utilitarian principles and rules receive highest support for the allocation of scarce medical resources. Although utilitarian choices are the most supported, the possible decision to use 'first come, first come' criterion is also supported. A common finding of all studies is that random allocation receives really low approval despite the fact that it is theoretically assumed to be the most egalitarian of all decision rules in such situations. Research also finds that allocation and reallocation of medical resources are not perceived as equivalent by the public.

In conclusion, the main contributions of the book are as follows:

- In depth examination of the topic of moral judgments in allocating scarce medical resources and the need for empirical research on the topic.
- Systematic examination of the topic from different points of view - from a theoretical (ethical) point of view, from the point of view of the medical standards and practices, and from a psychological point of view.

- Presenting empirical results about moral judgment in dilemma situations involving scarce medical resources and a conflict between utilitarian rules and the order of admitting the patients.
- Inclusion of a large number of participants in the empirical studies.
- Investigating the role of context and description of dilemmas by varying the type of the scarce medical resources.
- Investigating the role of the realism of the moral dilemma situation by varying the context of the events that led to the shortage of medical resources.
- Revealing that there is strong support for the utilitarian principles and related actions in the allocation of scarce medical resources. At the same time, relatively high support is found for the 'first come, first served' rule for the allocation of scarce resources. The support for random allocation is found to be extremely low.
- Demonstrating lower support for the utilitarian criteria in situations of reallocation compared to situations of allocation of scarce medical resources.
- Presenting data on the stability and replicability of the results in a culture other than the Bulgarian one.
- Discussion of the obtained results with a focus on their alignment with the theoretical views and the medical guidelines.