The Individual and the Collective: Ethics and Responsibility for Health

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The following discussion questions are provided as an additional educational tool to accompany this fireside chat video. Please feel free to select the questions that are most relevant to your committee or group, revise and adapt them as needed etc. As always, we welcome feedback on this or any other NSHEN resource.

1.   In the context of responsibility for health, explore the ethics issues related to the tensions between:
     a.   Personal choice and autonomy over health decisions vs. collective responsibility for health and issues of justice
     b.   Personal right to individual health vs. public duty to societal health
     c.   An individual's right vs. an individual's obligation to engage in healthy behaviours
     Is there more emphasis in our society on one over the other? If so, what are the consequences?

2.   What issues arise in promoting and supporting healthy behaviour related to vulnerability and social stigmatization of some populations/individuals?

3.   Do you agree with Vallis' assertion that patients often don't tell health care providers the truth about their health choices and health care providers don't always want to know the truth?

4.   What ethics issues arise when considering responsibility for children's health?

5.   What ethics issues arise when considering responsibility for health among those with mental illness?

6.   Are the health issues raised by Vallis (diabetes, smoking, obesity) discussed through the lens of health promotion or disease prevention? Does this difference affect how one views issues related to personal vs. collective responsibility for health?

7.   Does the impact or outcome of one's personal health choices affect who holds responsibility for them? For example, harming only one's self (smoking in one's home) vs. harm to others (smoking in public).

8.   Discuss some of the ethics issues that arise related to public policy around health behaviour? For example, taxing unhealthy products, tax breaks for healthy products and programmes, restrictions on the sale of tobacco and alcohol, mandating bike helmets etc.

9.   Can we consider "living at risk" cases through the lens of responsibility for health? Does this change how you view the ethics issues related to patients living at risk?

10. What are some ethical implications of our society valuing good health and healthy choices as a social good.

Resources

Behaviour Change Institute: http://www.behaviourchangeinstitute.ca

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