

Correspondence

Leadership: towards equitable COVID-19 vaccination

ABSTRACT

Transformational leaders can lead the society towards equitable access to COVID-19 vaccination. They prioritize most the public health's well-being, including the poor and the most vulnerable. Thus, authentic leaders can work through a public health crisis's maelstrom. Through service and inspiration, the community can help out, collaborate and find solutions to mitigate the ill-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords leadership, equity, values, health service

To the Editor

The recent editorial posed valuable insights about the collateral damage of COVID-19. The original response to contain the spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) was to preserve the health service and treat patients with all kinds of conditions.¹ The editor succinctly pointed out the decline in the delivery of health services to non-COVID-19 illness. But hope begins to set foot as several countries started the COVID-19 vaccination.

However, the current supply of COVID-19 vaccines is small, yet the demand is universal. Countries with easy access to the vaccines and are capable of acquiring more than what they need will inevitably force low-income nations to miss out on life-saving vaccinations. The question arises: 'Why are the poor and vulnerable always at the end of the line?' Lessons learned from various literature lead us to advocacy towards the vulnerable.² Fair access to COVID-19 vaccines will protect many people, both the rich and the poor, from being infected with the virulent disease, paving the way to some sense of normalcy and spur the sluggish world economy to recovery.

The issue of who should be inoculated first has already been debated even before the availability of COVID-19 vaccines. Carefully considering the limited number of vaccines, many governments devised different ways to its distribution. The plans are aligned with the goal of reducing mortality by controlling the spread and transmission of COVID-19. Some countries prioritized the vaccination of those in 'care homes' first, followed by older people, and then the frontline health

workers.³ In contrast, some countries opted to vaccinate the healthcare personnel first, followed by older people.⁴ The reason being front liners are at significant risk of getting infected with the contagious disease.

Leadership is now needed to resolve the contentious issue of equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. Nations deal with the pandemic in different ways and those with good leaders seem to have positively handled the mitigation of the disease. Undoubtedly, effective leadership is critical as we continue to navigate uncharted waters. Czabanowska and Rethmeier proposed a value-based leadership that involves leaders' ethical behaviour since values play a significant role in an institution's organizational structure.⁵ As such, transformational, authentic and ethical qualities are needed by decision-makers to lead effectively. Furthermore, it is vital to integrate behaviour with values when serving the population. Values such as 'service,' 'compassion,' and 'collaboration' are critical in public health. It is when leaders are guided by moral values that they can serve people well. Transformational leaders guide decision-makers towards equitable access to COVID-19 vaccination. They serve with integrity in society, government, private institutions and health organizations. They prioritize most the public health's well-being, including the poor and the most vulnerable. Thus, leaders and decision-makers who embodied these characteristics can work through a public health crisis's maelstrom by serving, inspiring and moving others to help out, collaborate and find solutions to mitigate the ill-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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