



## Case Study - 9 : Ebola Outbreak and Experimental Drugs

**The Ebola outbreak in Nigeria has affected thousands of people in a short span of time and infected many others. There is no vaccine or treatment available to cure the disease. You are the head of the health department of one of the countries that have been severely hit by the epidemic. While there is no treatment currently available for the disease, an experimental drug is being used in some other country. This drug has shown positive results and consequently some of the patients have also managed to recover from the disease. However, it is not yet clear whether the relief came due to the drug alone, or otherwise.**

**Given the high mortality rate of the disease and its rapid spread, other countries affected by this disease have already given a go-ahead for the mass production of this experimental drug. But some health experts are sceptical about the efficacy of the drug and have even warned against its use as it may result in some deadly side-effects.**

- a. **Bring out and discuss the above case.**
- b. **What would you do in the above situation? Give reasons.**

### Solution

a. The ethical issues involved in this case are:

Responsibility of the leader to make crucial decisions in a crisis situation even with the risks involved.

Right to medical treatment of affected persons.

Threat to life and likely side effects of the experimental drug and the opportunity cost of not taking the risk of trying the drug.

The veracity of the advice against the drug's use by health experts in face of some positive results of the drug effects from other countries.

Right of human being against medical experimentation in face of likely side effect hazards.

The responsibility of the state to protect its citizens from health hazards by investing in medical Research and development.

b. In the crisis situation the aim of any action taken must be

To protect the lives of as many people as possible.

To ensure that any medication doesn't have long-term hazards, i.e., it should not bypass long term effects just to have short term gains.

To prevent the spread of the disease by quarantining the affected persons to remote and secure locations.

Thus, I would take the following measures:

Call an urgent meeting of health experts to discuss the drug, the positive results and also discuss the measures to contain the disease.

Based on their recommendations, I would raise awareness among people through the media who would themselves undertake precautionary measures at the individual level.

I would consult if the drug can be tested on patients in their terminal stage while also taking the consent of their family and giving financial compensation in case of death. Thus, I would try to get the drug tested. In case of positive results, I would ask doctors to administer the drug gradually and record all the symptoms. In case of any harmful symptom, I will stop its use.

Meanwhile, I would send a health expert team to the other country where the drug tested positive to study and verify how it worked.

In case of drug failing at experimenting stage, my efforts would be directed to check the spread of disease while ensuring all medical support to affected patients.

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