Week 7 Discussion - The Demon in the Freezer

Finish reading The Demon in the Freezer this week. As you read the book, please make notes to be able to respond the questions listed below and upload in the discussion board by Thursday of Week 7. Reply to at least two other students' posts by Saturday.

As we are all well aware, context is everything and nothing happens in isolation. Decisions are impacted by many factors and those decisions have consequences for and impact many things as well. Although we have the benefit of hindsight, the individuals in The Demon in the Freezer did not. Throughout the book, many of them were confronted with ethical decisions and dilemmas with far-reaching impact and consequences.

1) Select one of the major “players” in the book and respond to the following: To what degree did and should the individual have followed a moral compass that was consistent with the Five Principles of Morality as well as with the epidemiology ethics guidelines and code of ethics for health education professionals?

2) Considering the political and social backdrop of 1999, state and defend your position as to whether you would have voted to destroy the stocks of smallpox or kept them alive for research purposes. Remember this is pre-9/11.

3) In the aftermath of 9/11 and the anthrax attacks, and from a public health standpoint, what (if any) additional information do you believe should have been made public and what methods should have been used to communicate with the public to insure that accurate information was disseminated without causing undue anxiety and panic?

Discussion Response:

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by Jill Marshall - Thursday, June 20, 2013, 5:05 PM

1) Select one of the major “players” in the book and respond to the following: To what degree did and should the individual have followed a moral compass that was consistent with the Five Principles of Morality as well as with the epidemiology ethics guidelines and code of ethics for health education professionals?

The character I chose to respond to is Lawrence Brilliant, as he demonstrated almost a personification of the five principles of morality. As I read this book, this character seemed to stand out to me the most with regards to a moral compass that is consistent with the Five Principles of Morality as well as the epidemiology ethics guidelines and code of ethics for health education professionals. I believe that this character’s desire to help demonstrated all five principles. He traveled back and forth multiple times to try to help with the eradication of smallpox. Even though he was sent home over a dozen times, his value for life, and his desire to do good were ever so present. He would drive for 17 hours every trip until he was finally offered a position to help. I was also impressed by his demonstration of the other three of the five principles. He would speak to people in their own language and encourage them to make informed choices. He would also demonstrate much respect and autonomy by validating cultural beliefs and finding a way to educate them that was respectful to their culture.

Additionally, Brilliant was able to uphold the Five Moral Principles even when he was faced with the largest outbreak in the world during the years of eradication. Brilliant demonstrated this through his actions with the
Tatanagar outbreak. In this situation, Brilliant, without authority or support from the district medical officer, was able to stand up for what was right and stop the train, initiate roadblocks, and quarantine the city. He closed the bus station (stopping all buses from running) and closed the airport. All of these decisions were very crucial and important and seemed to come so naturally to this character.

2) Considering the political and social backdrop of 1999, state and defend your position as to whether you would have voted to destroy the stocks of smallpox or kept them alive for research purposes. Remember this is pre-9/11.

From a political stand-point, this is a tough call especially given the period of time. This occurred in 1999 just after the end of the cold-war where having something someone didn’t have meant power whether it was the power to cure or the power to destroy. Having something so powerful allowed for the two keepers of the “demon” to play God, or at least a demigod. For many decades the USA and the Soviet Union faced this with weapons of mass destruction, but given the fall of the Soviet Union and the uncertainty of Russia, how could the USA be certain that if they destroyed their stocks, that others such as Russia would do the same. There is also the uncertainty that others may have an unidentified stock in secret.

From an ethical stand-point the stocks should be destroyed. If the purpose was to eradicate the disease, it is not truly eradicated until all possibilities of it emerging are destroyed. The agreement was to eradicate the disease and keeping it for scientific curiosity or political intimidation, negotiation, or validation is not consistent with the five principles of morality nor the epidemiology ethics guidelines and ethics for health education professionals. DA Henderson was right in saying that the USA should take the moral high ground and that he should have voted to destroy the stocks in 1980.

3) In the aftermath of 9/11 and the anthrax attacks, and from a public health standpoint, what (if any) additional information do you believe should have been made public and what methods should have been used to communicate with the public to insure that accurate information was disseminated without causing undue anxiety and panic?

From a public health standpoint the information communicated to the public should be honest, sincere, and communicate the facts. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) the information that should be communicated during the initial phase of a crisis should be delivered with simplicity, credibility, verifiability, consistency, and speed. The information should acknowledge the event with empathy, explain and inform the public in the simplest terms about the risk, establish organizational spokesperson credit, provide emergency courses of action including how and where to receive more information, and a commitment to stakeholders and the public for continued communication (CDC, 2002). This method should have been used with the onset of every outbreak, at least to the affected area and community.

The CDC also recommends that as the crisis evolves, it is important to anticipate sustained media interest and scrutiny as well as unexpected developments, rumors or misinformation. At resolution, it is recommended that the information provided allows for a return to stasis with an increased understanding about the crisis as complete and that recovery systems have been put in place (CDC, 2002).

References:
