

As a doctor in Primary Healthcare Centre, you are implementing immunization programmed in your locality. A section of local community claiming that immunization is against their religious belief has boycotted the programmed. You request them to bring their children highlighting the risks of non – immunization. You also show data to prove your point. Despite your efforts, they are not convinced. Also, few people argue that there is no need of immunization diseases. Few from your staff suggest you not to press further and let the children from that community suffer. Even your wife/husband asks you not to take risk as you might face violent protest from the community.

What action will you take in this situation? Substantiate

General framework

1. Give a small Introduction.
2. Identify stakeholders and their interests in the given scenario.
3. Mention the ethical dilemma in front of the decision-maker.
4. List the possible actions that you can take, together with their benefits and drawbacks.
5. Choose the line of action that you will opt and mention the values it will help secure.
6. Provide your closing remarks.

Facts of the case study (no need to write in the exam)

1. Me being the head of immunization programme in my locality.
2. A certain section of religious group boycotting the programme.
3. Risks of non-immunization for the children.
4. My staff also reluctant to immunize and is ok with the children from that community to suffer.
5. Possibility of violent protests from the community.

Solution

Introduction

The case study highlights a scenario of vaccine hesitancy based on religious beliefs which is a known phenomenon across the world. Even W.H.O. characterizes vaccine hesitancy as a global health threat.

Stakeholders involved and their interests

1. Group of people who are refusing vaccination who think it goes against their belief system.
2. Children who belong to the community who by not being vaccinated are exposed to disease risk.
3. I, the doctor who is in charge of the vaccination programme in the district.
4. Staff of the Primary Health centre who also does not seem very accommodating towards the community.
5. Spouse who is worried about my well-being.

Ethical dilemma for me

As a doctor and as the head of vaccination programme in my area I am faced with the dilemma whether to do my duty i.e., to persuade the community for vaccination or to think about my own life and the concerns of my staff.

I am faced with the dilemma to think about public interest (i.e. interest of children who are the future of the country) vs my own self-interest.

Actions that can be taken with their benefits and drawbacks

Option 1

The first option available with me is to listen to my staff and spouse and not to pursue the community further for vaccination.

The merits going for this option are

1. It is pragmatic thinking since pressing for immunization will not change the strong belief against vaccination that religious people hold in a short time.
2. It will be prudent to safeguard the interest of the staff as any violent protest may impact them.
3. It will maintain the confidence of my staff in me as I show trust in their practical knowledge on dealing with such situation.

The demerits of this option are

1. This would be adopting an escapist route and would amount to abdication of my responsibility.
2. The children of the community may suffer and this would show lack of integrity on my part as I clearly know more than anyone else the advantages of the vaccine for them.
3. This may also have domino effect on the other people in the area who may also develop vaccine hesitancy and it may jeopardise the whole vaccination programme.

Option 2

The second option available to me is to persuade the people for vaccinating their children by taking support of administration. I would recommend following measures to the local administration to in still confidence in the people.

1. Using informative posters, hoardings and real-time billboards (showing status of vaccination) in and around the city.
2. Roping in the local schools and teaching children the significance of vaccine. Thus making children as agent of change in society.
3. Coordinating and convincing religious leaders to guide the community about the importance of vaccines.
4. Incentivising areas (mohallas) with the highest vaccination rates.
5. Provide security for the medical professional during immunization.

Besides I will motivate my staff and remind them of their core duty towards well-being of the people.

I will also take my spouse in confidence and ask her/him to support me morally in execution of my duty.

The merits going for this option are

1. This will help boost vaccination rates and help protect lives of many innocent children against diseases.
2. It will set an example of dedication to public service for my staff thus creating future leadership.
3. This will ensure the benefits of government programmes reach all beneficiaries without discrimination.
4. This move would be in line with public values of compassion and integrity.

The demerits of this option are

1. There is a possibility of backlash from the community.
2. There is a possibility that my staff won't cooperate.

Chosen line of action and the values it secures

I will choose the second option over first option i.e. I will try to persuade the specific religious community while taking help of the local administrations, religious leaders, schools and my staff.

It will choose second option as it helps to set the right example for others to follow. It will ensure the right to life and health for the children as enshrined in Constitution. It will help uphold my integrity and nurture my fortitude to deal with difficult situations like this.

Conclusion

As a doctor, as a public servant and a citizen it is my prime duty to protect lives and take steps to promote scientific temper in the general masses Any kind of vaccine hesitancy based on unfound fears needs to be eliminated to achieve the higher objective of public good.