

Ethics, Ebola and Epidemiological Issues (Sponsored by the Ethics Committee)
Monday, September 28th, 2015 at 1:15 pm – 2:45 pm

Epidemiologists play an important role in investigations of emerging and novel infectious disease outbreaks and rapid formulation of emergency public health responses to these health crises. Outbreaks may involve known pathogens for which the routes of transmission, diagnostic methods and treatments are well-established but appear in new geographic areas or novel pathogens that have not been known to cause disease in humans, previously. Whether the outbreak is considered novel, emergent, or both, outbreaks are emergency health situations that require immediate action and implementation of practical recommendations to avoid widespread morbidity or mortality. The Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in West Africa included rural and urban areas with no known prior human EVD cases leading to an unprecedented scale of disease spread. In such outbreaks, there is a need to rapidly learn more about the biology, ecology and epidemiology of the disease to control the ongoing outbreak and to prevent future outbreaks. Public health epidemiologists conduct disease surveillance and additional studies to facilitate disease control as well as conduct studies to generate new scientific knowledge for disease prevention and other public health functions. During the EVD outbreak, scientific studies were limited to those supporting the immediate disease control efforts. Furthermore, conduct of scientific studies in the West African countries heavily affected by EVD were further complicated by poor public health infrastructure and baseline low levels of health by standard indicators, such as infant mortality, maternal mortality and life expectancy. Sound ethical principles are necessary when considering epidemiologic investigations and implementing or evaluating control measures, even in settings where the underlying standards of care and community norms for behavior may differ greatly from those of the countries and organizations that respond. This session will describe application of these ethical principles during the EVD outbreak, discuss challenges encountered, and consider how collective past experiences meet the current ethical norms in large-scale communicable disease investigations.

Moderator: Jennifer Salerno, PhD, McMaster University

Speakers:

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