BACKGROUND PAPER:

Human Rights Council

The Ethics of Healthcare in War Zones

“People are dying, people are suffering-- this is a crisis. We cannot watch as this unfolds-- we have to push as hard as we can to improve the life and living conditions of these people.”

- Doctors Without Borders

Introduction: The ethics of utilizing healthcare in war torn zones has been a moral issue since the beginning of modern conflict. The issue is whether or not it is ethical to send doctors into zones where medical care is greatly needed, but would put those individuals at a great personal risk. Organization such as Doctors Without Borders and the Red Cross are faced with the ethical dilemma of this issue everyday.

Background & History: The organization of Doctors Without Borders, known around the world as MSF began in May of 1968. Revolts in Paris wreaked havoc and violence in the city and on its inhabitants. It was then that a group of young doctors decided to risk themselves to help those in need, even though they were in dangerous and dire circumstances. Ever since then, the organization has blossomed into an international force that utilizes the medical abilities of professionals to help those who truly need it. The Red Cross, while not a medical organization in nature is known for being one of the first and most responsive in the face of disaster. The UN also has a large hand in sending in doctors and supplies for the aforementioned organizations. While this work is vital, it is dangerous to all involved.

Current Situation: One of the most troubled areas in the modern world continues to be in the Middle East. The civil war in Syria has displaced millions of refugees in the past five years and that number only continues to grow, and as all of these victims are relocated into camps, many of them are in desperate need of medical care. Even though
there is a huge need for supplies and doctors within these areas, they are targets for further attacks and violence. Whether or not valuable and innocent members of society should be sent to these areas is a major point of contention.

On February 15, 2016 a MSF supported hospital in Northern Syria was targeted and attacked, in which not only 16 patients and 9 doctors were killed (injured?). This strike was committed through a series of missiles strikes and though no group has claimed responsibility, it is presumed as an attack from an extremist group protesting foreign involvement in Syrian affairs. After this attack nearly 40,000 native Syrians were left without medical care. Sadly these situations and those like it are quite common in war torn and terrorist controlled nations, and it brings into question the morality of sending innocents into very potentially life threatening situations.

**The Problem:**
Should the UN send emergency health workers into conflict zones if their lives are in danger? Health workers are an often-targeted group in these situations and when health workers are killed, the patients that they are supposed to be helping have their lives in jeopardy as well. Robin Coupland says, “The wounded and the hospitals are being integrated into the conflict.” However, a larger conundrum comes into play when we consider the thousands of lives that could be saved if emergency doctors from organizations such as Doctors Without Borders or the World Health Association worked to help heal the wounded.

**Relevant Documents:**
http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/90/1/12-030112/en/

**Bloc Positions:**
Delegates will be encouraged to support their country’s position regarding aid to warring nations in relation to healthcare. This committee will deal with issues regarding sending aid in the form of healthcare to warring nations and the perpetuation or discontinuation of healthcare for victims of war.

**Committee Mission:**
Our mission is to debate the ethics of healthcare in conflict zones and come to resolution on how to best serve the healthcare needs of those in areas of conflict.
Questions to Consider:

1.) What conflicts are currently facing your nation? Is your country in a position to receive or give medical aid?
2.) What is your country’s policy on receiving/accepting medical aid? What has your country done in the past?
3.) Has your country ever targeted hospitals or other medical bases during a conflict? Why or why not?
4.) What is your country’s relationship with organizations such as Doctors Without Borders and the World Health Association?

Sources for Further Research:


https://www.safeguardinghealth.org/resources

http://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/66/66314_1map14.png

http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/06/27/syrias-war-on-doctors?mbid=n1_160621_Daily&CNDID=40033844&spMailingID=9091390&spUserID=MTE4ODg3NzY3NDM4S0&spJobID=942069823&spReportId=OTQyMDY5ODIzS0

Chairs: If you have any questions, please contact us!

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