DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Request for Comments on Ethical Considerations and Implications of Public Health Emergency Response With a Focus on the Current Ebola Virus Disease Epidemic

AGENCY: Office of the Secretary, Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues, Office of the Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues is requesting public comment on ethical considerations and implications of public health emergency response with a focus on the current Ebola virus disease epidemic.

DATES: To ensure consideration, comments must be received by 5:00 p.m. EST on February 6, 2015. Comments received after this date will be considered only as time permits.

ADDRESSES: Individuals, groups, and organizations interested in commenting on this topic may submit comments by email to info@bioethics.gov or by mail to the following address: Public Commentary, Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues, 1425 New York Ave. NW., Suite C–100, Washington, DC 20005.


SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On November 24, 2009, the President established the Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues (the Commission) to advise him on bioethical issues generated by novel and emerging research in biomedicine and related areas of science and technology. The Commission is charged with identifying and promoting policies and practices that ensure ethically responsible conduct of scientific research and health care delivery. Undertaking these duties, the Commission seeks to identify and examine specific bioethical, legal, and social issues related to potential scientific and technological advances; examine diverse perspectives and possibilities for international collaboration on these issues; and recommend legal, regulatory, or policy actions as appropriate.

The Commission is considering three areas of ethical concern raised by public health emergency response with a focus on the current Ebola virus disease (EVD) epidemic. The first area concerns U.S. public policy and public health emergencies; the EVD epidemic might or should affect public health response to the current EVD epidemic. The second area concerns the ethics of placebo-controlled trials in the context of public health emergencies; and future public health issues and the EVD epidemic specifically:

- Ethical and scientific standards for public health emergency response;
- Ethical and scientific standards that guide the use of quarantine or other movement restrictions during public health emergencies;
- The impact of quarantine or other movement restrictions on the availability or willingness of health workers to volunteer to contain the epidemic in disease-affected areas;

The third area of concern is the ethics of placebo-controlled trials during public health emergencies:

- Ethical and scientific standards for placebo-controlled trials during public health emergencies;
- Ethical and scientific standards for collection, storage, and international sharing of biospecimens and associated data during public health emergencies.

To this end, the Commission is inviting interested parties to provide input and advice through written comments. Comments will be publicly available, including any personally identifiable or confidential business information that they contain. Trade secrets should not be submitted.

Dated: November 20, 2014.

Lisa M. Lee, Executive Director, Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues.