Reviewer's report

Title: On pandemics and the duty to care: whose duty? who cares?

Version: 2 Date: 18 March 2006

Reviewer: Matthew K. Wynia

Reviewer's report:

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
None.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
None

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
Though the authors now note a statement from the AMA code of ethics that is directly relevant, I still wonder whether they have looked at other major medical association documents on this issue. For example the American College of Physicians and the Infectious Disease Society of America have a long-standing policy that is very blunt on the duty to treat (it came out during the early years of the AIDS epidemic, but it is much broader than just AIDS). I don't know about the BMA, but I wouldn't be surprised if they have a statement as well. I've scanned the WMA and didn't see anything immediately, but it would be worthwhile contacting them. In short, I think a careful review of a variety of major medical association policies is in order before saying that this issue is not addressed in current codes. That said, even if this paper is simply a call for the CMA to get more involved, it would still be worthwhile - after all, one might have imagined Canada to be a leader in addressing this ethical issue.

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I am an employee of the American Medical Association and I work in the ethics area, though I am not directly involved in writing policies.