Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

Dr. Srinivasan is a senior scientist working for a reputed biotechnology company known for its cutting-edge research in pharmaceuticals. Dr. Srinivasan is heading a research team working on a new drug aimed at treating a rapidly spreading variant of a new viral infectious disease. The disease has been rapidly spreading across the world and the cases reported in the country are increasing. There is huge pressure on Dr. Srinivasan's team to expedite the trials for the drug as there is significant market for it, and the company wants to get the first-mover advantage in the market. During a team meeting, some senior team members suggest some shortcut for expediting the clinical trials for the drug and for getting the requisite approvals. These include manipulating data to exclude some negative outcomes and selectively reporting positive results, foregoing the process of informed consent and using compounds already patented by a rival company, rather than developing one's own component. Dr. Srinivasan is not comfortable taking such shortcuts, at the same time he realises meeting the targets is impossible without using these means.

(a) What would you do in such a situation?

(b) Examine your options and consequences in the light of the ethical questions involved.

(c) How can data ethics and drug ethics save humanity at large in such a scenario?

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2024	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
20	~250 words

Answer Hint

Scientific integrity, patient safety, informed consent, data ethics, research ethics, intellectual property, transparency, accountability, public health

Model Answer

Introduction

Dr. Srinivasan faces a conflict between **commercial pressure and scientific integrity**, where shortcuts could compromise patient safety and public health. In pharmaceutical research, ethical conduct is essential because unreliable evidence can harm not only trial participants but society at large.

Body

(a) Course of Action

I would refuse to manipulate data, suppress adverse outcomes or bypass informed consent. I would document the concerns and recommend an accelerated but **scientifically valid and ethically approved trial process**. The institutional ethics committee and appropriate regulatory authorities should be consulted.

Regarding the rival's patented compounds, the company should obtain a lawful licence or develop a legitimate alternative rather than infringing intellectual property rights. If management continues to demand unethical practices, I would use internal compliance and whistle-blower mechanisms and, where necessary, approach competent regulatory authorities.

(b) Options and Consequences

Following shortcuts may produce rapid approval and commercial advantage, but it can cause patient harm, invalidate scientific conclusions, lead to regulatory action, litigation, loss of public trust and damage to the credibility of science.

Following ethical procedures may delay market entry and increase costs, but it protects trial participants, preserves data reliability and enables the development of a genuinely safe and effective medicine.

Accelerating within ethical boundaries—through adequate resources, parallel administrative processes, validated trial designs and continuous safety monitoring—provides a responsible middle path between urgency and integrity.

(c) Role of Data and Drug Ethics

Data ethics requires accuracy, completeness, transparency, reproducibility and responsible handling of adverse outcomes. Selective reporting can distort scientific knowledge and lead to unsafe medical decisions.

Drug ethics requires respect for informed consent, beneficence, non-maleficence, scientific validity, fair participant selection and independent ethical oversight. Intellectual-property rights must also be respected while ensuring that public-health emergencies do not become excuses for unethical experimentation.

Conclusion

The ethical principle should be **“speed with safety, innovation with integrity.”** Maintaining trustworthy evidence and protecting human subjects ensures that scientific progress serves humanity rather than exposing society to avoidable risks.

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