



# Cameroon Bioethics Initiative (CAMBIN)

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## Statement by the Cameroon Bioethics Initiative (CAMBIN) on the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Coronavirus disease19 (Covid-19) is spreading at an unprecedented pace across the globe, with more than 1,912,438 confirmed cases and 118,683 deaths across 209 countries and territories as of April 13, 2020.

CAMBIN (the Cameroon Bioethics Initiative) has as its fundamental purpose strengthening research capacity in Cameroon, the central African region and African continent at large, through promoting research ethics principles, ensuring protection of research participants, and providing training and education for students, researchers and members of research ethics committees /institutional review boards.

Currently there are no effective drugs or vaccines against Covid-19, and no rapid and affordable point of care diagnostics to test patients. However, there are claims about the effectiveness of certain existing medications for Covid-19 patient management. CAMBIN supports the compassionate use of such medications in the context of a physician-patient relationship, based on the professional judgement of the attending physician(s). CAMBIN equally recognizes the immediate need for mobilization of research activities within the framework of Covid-19 response efforts, in order to generate reliable data and the evidence base for guiding clinical practice and public health decision-making.

Although research may play a critical role in helping get a handle on the pandemic, research conducted within crises settings may pose particular ethical challenges. CAMBIN calls on national governments and national regulatory authorities to monitor and investigate any claims of efficacious treatments or biomedical interventions that are proposed during epidemic emergencies, and to help provide the framework for systematic evaluations of interventions in our local settings. Perhaps one of the most critical principles of bioethics to highlight at the moment is the principle of access to benefits; it is essential that any biomedical products evaluated within our settings that are proven effective must subsequently be made available to local populations. Governments should also begin planning how to promote domestic production of proven diagnostics, drugs, or vaccines as these new products become available.

One of the challenges of conducting research during health emergencies is the 'Time factor'. Given enormous pressures to initiate studies, some institutions or researchers may be tempted to 'cut corners', to relax requirements for ethical review of protocols, and there may be those who may take advantage of patients in vulnerable circumstances. CAMBIN calls on governments, national regulatory authorities and other relevant institutions to be on high alert for unethical research studies and practices. CAMBIN is available and ready to contribute towards fighting this invisible enemy through issuing of relevant opinion statements and reviewing research protocols, including clinical trials that may be conducted in Cameroon and/or in any other African country. We are committed to thorough, comprehensive, and rapid review of scientific study protocols, in order to maximize timeliness of research efforts.

CAMBIN endorses SHUTDOWN of non-essential public activities and other effective measures to reduce the spread of the infection, including stay at home orders and/or suspension of non-essential intra/inter-urban travels to and from epidemic hotspots. Such actions which restrain some individual liberties and freedoms should, however, be complemented with appropriate measures to cushion the socio-economic impact of the measures enforced, including access to basic goods and services.

We strongly advise people to listen and at least adhere strictly to the [WHO guidelines](#) on prevention and containment of the virus, and the national checklist derived from them as published by the relevant national government Ministries/Departments.

CAMBIN strongly endorses local production, distribution and appropriate use of effective facemasks as long as the epidemic persists.

We look forward to working with the research community in this time of crisis, to overcome the enormous challenges through building solidarity, harnessing the power of science, and strengthening our structures of research ethics and governance.

Odile Ouwe Missi Oukem-Boyer, PhD

Chair

(For and on behalf of the CAMBIN)

15<sup>th</sup> April 2020

