

# Guest editorial

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**T**he COVID-19 pandemic primarily fractured social and economic structures around the world, but its implications have gone beyond public health concerns. In this special issue (SI) themed human rights in health care during COVID-19 and other pandemics, the Journal aims to contribute to the respect, protection and fulfillment of human rights in the context of a public health crisis. This publication would not have been possible without the community of committed authors, reviewers and journal administrators who were central to organizing this SI especially during a pandemic.

First, we want to thank the authors who actively responded to our call for papers (CFP) and patiently responded to the comments and recommendations of the reviewers during the course of the review process. Using different frameworks and coming from various contexts, the authors responsibly illustrate the complexity of human rights in health care during a pandemic. In so doing, the authors depart from reductionist and limited stories about the ways human rights in health care have been challenged, negotiated and reimagined. Without their contributions, this SI would not be possible.

Second, we wish to express our gratitude to all anonymous reviewers. In a time where it was extremely difficult to find appropriate reviewers and subject-matter experts, the reviewers have generously accepted our invitations. They have shared their comments and recommendations in the most constructive way possible. Despite their other scholarly, administrative and personal commitments, they have patiently engaged with the revisions across multiple rounds of review. With their comments and recommendations, the anonymous reviewers have shown that rigor and gentleness are not mutually exclusive but are interconnected.

In this SI, we have learned from the journal administrators as much as from the authors and the reviewers. We want to express our gratitude to Eleanor and Ruchita. By patiently and promptly responding to our questions and concerns, Eleanor and Ruchita made the process of organizing this SI less difficult. We also wish to thank Theo and Jo for giving us this opportunity by approving our CFP.

Taken together, the seven articles in this SI were chosen for these collectively and powerfully emphasize the importance of preserving human dignity during a pandemic. On the one hand, these illustrate the different ways human rights in health care have been challenged. On the other hand, these also show how human rights in health care can be negotiated and reimagined. This SI does not intend to be exhaustive but rather illustrative of the different approaches and highlight different contexts for problematizing human rights in health care during COVID-19. In the succeeding paragraphs, we elaborate on the unique contributions of each article.

In their article entitled “Limit your body area -a COVID-19 mass radicalisation challenging autonomy and basic human rights,” Stinne Glasdam and Sigrid Stejernsward broaden conversations about human rights in health care during COVID-19 in two ways. First, they illustrate how states and health organizations can reorganize the lives of citizens during a pandemic. At the same time, Glasdam and Stejernsward have shown how citizens can exercise their agency to negotiate with a growing number of laws and recommendations to combat the virus. Second, they point to how social media can enhance knowledge of citizens about COVID-19 and its severity. In the process, however, as Glasdam and

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Stjernsward discussed, social media may only reinforce dominant medical discourses about the virus. Overall, Glasdam and Stjernsward have enriched this SI by empirically looking at ways into which organizations and social media may help in enabling and restraining human rights in health care during COVID-19.

Extending the importance of organizations to a discussion of human rights in health care during COVID-19 is the article entitled “Undocumented in the time of pandemic: exploring legal violence, health care and human rights of irregular Filipino migrants in Italy and the UK” by Ron Bridget Vilog and Carlos Piosos III. Drawing empirical evidence from policy texts and in-depth interviews, they found that the pandemic made it even more difficult for undocumented migrants to access quality health care and information in destination countries. Instead of just focusing on problems, they have shown how migrant organizations can become partners in promoting migrant health especially during COVID-19. Vilog and Piosos have made a unique contribution to this SI by showing similarities and differences in experiences of undocumented migrants from two countries from the voices of migrant organization leaders.

In his article entitled “Migrant health as a human right amidst COVID-19: A culture-centered approach,” Mohan Jyoti Dutta listened to voices of migrants in Singapore during the pandemic. Based on empirical evidence from in-depth interviews with low-wage migrants, he found that poor health was directly linked with crowded bedrooms, poor toilet and water facilities and limited access to masks in dormitories. By listening to stories of migrant workers about the value of collective organizing, he further illustrated the overlooked link between health and labor rights. In so doing, Dutta made at least two unique contributions to this SI. First, he built on communicative theorizing especially the culture-centered approach to frame the issue of migration and human rights in health care. Second, he created safe spaces for low-wage migrant workers to articulate their shared solutions for better migrant health in destination countries.

In their conceptual paper entitled “Analysing the interplay between the right to health and pharmaceutical patent rights in the introduction of a COVID-19 vaccine into the Philippines,” Mario Cerilles, Jr and Harry Gwynn Omar M. Fernan examined the flexibilities allowed by international agreements and Philippine patent laws to illustrate the balance between the right to health and patent rights of the pharmaceutical industry. In so doing, they explore the economic and health challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and conclude that the Philippine Government may pursue parallel importation and compulsory licensing under the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights. Least developed and developing countries are encouraged to look for solutions that go beyond the application of the law to gain access to COVID-19 vaccines.

Maria Helbich and Samah Jabr, in their viewpoint paper entitled “Analysis of the mental health response to COVID-19 and human rights concerns in the occupied Palestinian territories,” analyzed the dual struggles of the Palestinians with the ongoing Israeli occupation and human rights violations and the new challenges brought about by COVID-19. They highlighted how the pandemic is being used to further attempts of annexation and political gains by Israel and emphasized how this preexisting context compounded mental health concerns in the region because of lack of preparedness in providing needed health services.

Ellery Altshuler reviewed historical human rights violations in freedom of expression and the press and looked at the public health impact of these transgressions. Altshuler found that many governments have used the guise of controlling the virus to silence critics and stifle the press, allowing for the spread of misinformation and blocking productive debates. This viewpoint paper shows the ways in which human rights are threatened during the COVID-19 outbreak and reinforces the importance of freedom of expression and the press in social crises.

In her paper, Christianne France Collantes exposed the dismissal of the housing and democratic rights of the urban poor in the Philippines in her article entitled “Unforgotten Informal Communities and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Sitio San Roque under Metro Manila’s Lockdown.” Paying particular attention to the plight of vulnerable communities in the COVID-19 pandemic, Collantes argued that the threats of demolitions, evictions, arrests and “shoot to kill” orders threaten the rights of the poor, who are often “forgotten” as marginalized sectors. She concludes that the forgetful planning in Metro Manila is the same reason that makes the impoverished critically vulnerable to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Responses to a public health crisis should not be taken in violation of fundamental human rights. We invite the human rights and public health community to continue the academic discourse on COVID-19 toward a lasting solution to COVID-19 with human dignity as the core foundation.

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