

# WMA General Assembly: MEDICAL ETHICS IN A GLOBALISED WORLD



Text by Dr Vishalkumar G Shelat

Medical ethics, healthcare ethics and bioethics are evolving terms, gathering under the recent trending nomenclature of “global bioethics”.

The term “global” can be understood in at least five different ways. First, “global” conveys a unified, universal moral code with transnational and cross-cultural applicability based on common morality rooted in Kantian deontological theory.<sup>1</sup> Second, “global” implies its relevance to issues faced across the globe: public health (in)equities, resource allocation, social determinants of health, etc. Third, “global” means that bioethical study transcends various disciplines, including but not limited to sociology, natural sciences, religious studies, biomedical science, law and healthcare. Fourth, “global” acknowledges the epiphenomenon of the globalisation of 21st century issues due to scientific and technological advances that have cross-border ramifications, and embraces its roots in a neoliberal society.<sup>2</sup> Fifth, “global” represents eliminating discrimination of a person, community, institution or state based on gender, skin colour, race, religion, language, socio-cultural background, political or birth status, economic capability, or any other variable. While it is common to read and hear of leaders and empowered office bearers applauding each other on their own exemplary achievements during the COVID-19 pandemic, the multi-million avoidable

deaths are a testament to administrative inefficiency, fragmented bureaucracy and deplorable health inequalities.

In line with current times, this year’s scientific meeting of the World Medical Association (WMA) General Assembly focused on “Medical ethics in a Globalised world”, which I had the privilege to attend and represent Singapore in.

The meeting took place from 5 October 2022 to 8 October 2022 in Berlin, Germany, and it was my first time flying to Germany. I had the opportunity to participate in lively discussions during scientific sessions, and exchange views and network with various bioethics faculty members of international repute, representatives from ASEAN countries, Commonwealth countries, the Asia-Pacific region, and the like. 8 October was particularly important – it was the day I participated in discussions about the issues of “racism” in medicine! The resulting document is uploaded on the WMA webpage as the *Declaration of Berlin on Racism in Medicine*.<sup>3</sup>

Usually, I prefer solitude, but it was natural that a philatelist (one of my hobbies) visiting Berlin would get acquainted with sectors and zones. Thus, I joined the WMA-organised city tour. In addition, I visited the renowned Pergamon museum (on the recommendation of A/Prof Anantham Devanand, Executive Director of

SMA Centre for Medical Ethics and Professionalism). I must extend my thanks to SMA for giving me this opportunity, to Denise Tan from the Secretariat for the seamless organisation of my travel (including handling the follow-up of baggage delays), and to my family for their support. ♦

## References

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2. Fay W. *Neoliberalism and Radical Rights: On the Work and Theory of Law and Organising.* *Int J Semiot Law* 2022; Sep 5:1-33 [Epub ahead of print].
3. *World Medical Association. Declaration of Berlin on Racism in Medicine.* In: *Press Releases.* Available at: <https://bit.ly/3SPH0wk>. Accessed 31 October 2022.

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