



Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

NATIONAL BIOETHICS COMMITTEE

VACCINATIONS

(22nd September 1995)

abstract

The opinion offers a contribution to the debate on obligatory and non-obligatory vaccinations at bioethical level, stressing the importance that this practice can have for individual and collective health. The obligation to vaccinate is not founded only on the right to health (Art. 32 of the Italian Constitution), but also on the duties of solidarity (Art. 2 of the Constitution).

Vaccinations have a preventive and also therapeutic value for some diseases, with a favorable relation between costs and benefits, as well as between risks and benefits, both for the single individual and the community. However, the problems that are most felt by public opinion concern the possibility of negative side effects, particularly allergic reactions, neurological problems and infections. These difficulties require greater precaution and careful medical evaluation in the case of the vaccinating of minors who are more prone to the undesired effects of medical treatment and incapable of deciding and taking the risk deriving from the lack of immunization.

The document stresses the need to guarantee proper information on the risks and benefits of vaccinations, which is necessary also in the obligatory health treatment and contributes to toning down the perception of danger which sometimes leads to the unjustified refusal of vaccinations, especially as far as concerns the infant population.

In the opinion doubts are expressed on the legitimacy of the conscientious objection to compulsory vaccinations, when these are required for the protection of the health of the individual and the community and there are no other methods to safeguard this good. It is asked that the state take the responsibility upon itself in an 'objective' way for any harm deriving from obligatory vaccinations, foreseeing rapid procedures for damages.

Lastly, the Committee recommends an incentive for the promotion of the culture of health, which could lead to the abolition of the obligation to vaccinate, should the spontaneous adhesion of the population allow it.