

## Honesty of Government Officials Regarding the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Following the announcement of the Covid-19 epidemic in China and its subsequent outbreak in many other countries, the authorities had different approaches to informing the public about this issue. Many government officials did not disclose this information at all or at the right time. Some of them even misled people or propagated false information. Some government officials have based their management on censorship or miscalculation in order to control the information dissemination and the spread of fear of disease among people. Moreover, some politicians believed that telling the truth could provoke people and arouse their anger (1). However, some people decided to leak information against the decision of the government; for instance, several doctors in China leaked part of the information, which was hidden by their government, through the media (1). This was followed by others in the United States and European countries who disclosed information, such as the news of the outbreak of the epidemic in their countries, the lack of medical facilities, and other material that was of public interest (2, 3).

Given that so far one of the best ways to control Covid-19 has been the cooperation of people in following the prevention protocols, the provision of accurate information can be very helpful in this regard. Public health depends on public trust and if people feel misled or misinformed, their adherence to social distancing and health protocols may be reduced which makes it more difficult to control the epidemic (4). In China, some local governments tried to hide the onset of the epidemic for personal gain or political

considerations, which prevented many patients from being saved in the early stages of the epidemic and led to widespread public discontent (5). Moreover, at the beginning of the epidemic, the Wuhan Municipality in China denied human-to-human transmission or infection of the medical personnel which resulted in public distrust. Therefore, when the Zhong Nanshan Academy confirmed and announced the human-to-human transmission, people questioned the truthfulness of this information (5).

In medical ethics, respect for the authority of the individual is one of the most important rights of the patients which obliges the doctors to provide the necessary and accurate information for them. Accordingly, it seems that during epidemics, people have the right to have access to accurate information at the right time. However, there are different opinions about the truth-telling to patients based on the current policies of countries and the socio-cultural status of the people. From an Islamic perspective, everyone has the right to know the truth about the matters related to them so that they can make informed decisions about their future. Furthermore, honesty and truthfulness are strongly emphasized in the Holy Quran and by the Infallibles (6).

Finally, it must be said that the information the governments release in times of crisis, such as pandemics, affects their credibility. In such circumstances, the governments must improve their ability to respond to crises in order to protect their credibility, maintain the public trust, and increase the cooperation of people for the control of the crisis.

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