

Episode: *Author Interview: “Which Factors Matter Most When Using Vaccines to Combat Zoonoses?”*

Guest: Erica Kaufman West, MD

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript by: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:04] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I’m your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Erica Kaufman West, the director of infectious diseases for the American Medical Association in Chicago, Illinois. She’s here to discuss her article, “*Which Factors Matter Most When Using Vaccines to Combat Zoonoses?*,” in the February 2024 issue of the Journal, [Health Ecology and Disease Transmission](#). Dr Kaufman West, thank you so much for being on the podcast with me. [music fades]

DR ERICA KAUFMAN WEST: Thank you for having me.

[00:00:43] HOFF: So, what is the main ethics point of your article?

KAUFMAN WEST: For me, I think the main ethics point is that there’s a great need to develop a way to prevent the transmission of neglected tropical diseases. Unfortunately, these diseases mostly affect people in low-income countries: Asia, Africa, Latin America. And because there’s no real financial profit for vaccine makers, there hasn’t up till now been any sort of urgency to create or study these. Now, there are vaccines that are being out there, and people have heard Dengue and Ebola vaccines being studied. But really, those are few and far between when you look at the broad range of infections that are out there affecting this population. These countries just don’t have the resources to pour into research and development, so unless high-income countries like ours band together and make this a priority, there’s really no hope that people will have relief from the multitude of infections that they face. And really, I think that’s the ethics point that, really, this article needs to bring out.

[00:01:52] HOFF: And so, what do you see as the most important thing for health professions students and trainees specifically to get from your article?

KAUFMAN WEST: Well, I think one important point is that there’s a great need for research in this area. So, vaccine research can be really tedious and arduous, but it has the ability to make a huge impact. And there are centers all over this country, for example. I used to work at Saint Louis University, and they have a vaccine center there. It was really wonderful to see how this is truly a multidisciplinary team that can get

together. There were PhDs, medical doctors, adult and pediatric physicians, veterinarians, and all trying to come together to conduct really groundbreaking research. We also need clinicians who are called to go to areas where diseases are hitting hardest to recruit for trials and educate, but also to bear witness to what's going on so that we can come together around this important notion of trying to treat diseases that, up until now, really have been largely ignored.

[00:03:00] HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point to your article that you didn't have the time or the space to fully explore, what would that be?

KAUFMAN WEST: I think it's that we as trainees, physicians, clinicians of all stripes need to speak up and really demand that governments and private companies focus on these diseases. We can't ignore them anymore. It's the ethical thing to do. It's the right thing to do. In addition, the world is getting smaller with travel and climate change, and we're starting to see these diseases in the US in people that have no travel history at all. And if we, as the doctors and future doctors of America, don't start to demand more out of our government and our private businesses, well, who will? [theme music returns]

[00:03:44] HOFF: Dr Kaufman West, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today, and thanks for your contribution to the Journal this month.

KAUFMAN WEST: Thank you again for having me.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, journalofethics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.