

NEWSLETTER

MEET OUR TEAM!



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"INTRODUCING THE SOUTHEAST ASIA BIOETHICS NETWORK"

BY ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR SHARON KAUR
CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR & LEAD APPLICANT OF AWARD

Dear Colleagues,

I am delighted to introduce the Southeast Asia (SEA) Bioethics Network in our inaugural newsletter. We are now in our second year of operation. The Network is funded by a Wellcome Trust Research Development Award. Our interdisciplinary committee, comprised of scholars from diverse backgrounds, is committed to advancing empirically informed bioethics from a Southeast Asian perspective. Join us as we embark on a journey to address emerging ethical challenges and amplify under-represented voices in SEA in the field of bioethics. We would love to hear from you and hope to see you at our events. This newsletter covers events from January to June 2024 and we hope you enjoy reading about the activities we have undertaken since the beginning of the year.

Best wishes,
Sharon Kaur



BUILDING THE FUTURE OF BIOETHICS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

»»» THE VISION, MISSION AND VALUES OF THE SOUTHEAST ASIA BIOETHICS NETWORK



At a two-day workshop held on 9-10 October 2023 in Langkawi, Malaysia, the Southeast Asia Bioethics Network took a significant step towards its formation. With 26 experts from various Southeast Asian countries, the workshop established the SEA Bioethics Network's Vision, Mission, and Values. This collaborative effort fostered insightful discussions and consensus through a modified Delphi method. The successful conclusion of the workshop marked a pivotal milestone for the bioethics community in Southeast Asia, setting the stage for the Network to play a crucial role in shaping the region's bioethical landscape.



The SEA Bioethics Network expresses heartfelt gratitude to the following individuals for their invaluable intellectual contributions:

- Ariel Pradipta (Universitas Indonesia)
- Đoàn Thanh Hải (University of Otago)
- Đông Thi Hoàì Tâm (Oxford University Clinical Research Unit)
- Graeme Thomas Laurie (University of Edinburgh)
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- Lim Mingjie Jane (Changi General Hospital)
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- Soputhy Chansovannara (National Institute of Public Health)
- Supa-at Asarath (Mahidol Oxford Tropical Medicine Research Unit)
- Yong Moi Ling (Ministry of Health, Brunei)



PUBLICATION

READ MORE

Our scoping review delves into the ethics of healthcare for mobile and marginalised populations in SEA, addressing key themes and research gaps. We identified 18 papers with substantial bioethical analysis, shedding light on ethical concepts such as 'capability, agency, dignity' and 'vulnerability'. Discover more about the critical intersection of migration, health and ethics in SEA.

Ng, S.H., Kaur, S., Cheah, P.Y., Ong, Z.L., Lim, J. and Voo, T.C. (2023). Migration health ethics in Southeast Asia: a scoping review. Wellcome Open Research, 8, p.391.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.12688/wellcomeopenres.19572.1>

ETHICAL HEALTHCARE FOR MIGRANTS

Dr. Ng Shu Hui highlighted the urgent need for culturally sensitive and equitable healthcare policies for migrants in Southeast Asia.

Dr. Ng Shu Hui's presentation at the 2023 ASB-UNHCR Research Workshop on Refugee Studies and Forced Displacement offered a comprehensive review of the ethical challenges in migrant and refugee healthcare in Southeast Asia. The scoping review underscored the urgent need for culturally sensitive and equitable healthcare policies, identifying significant gaps in current practices and proposing strategic recommendations. This work is pivotal in shaping an ethical approach for health services for displaced populations, ensuring that their rights and well-being are protected and promoted.



UPCOMING EVENTS

»»» ENGAGEMENT AT WELLCOME SYMPOSIUM

The core team of the Southeast Asia Bioethics Network will participate in the upcoming Wellcome Trust "Best Practice in Engagement and Culture Symposium" in Bristol, UK, from 15th to 18th July 2024. This symposium promises to be an invaluable opportunity for our team to exchange ideas, collaborate with experts and contribute to the discourse on bioethics and engagement practices as we share our experiences on developing a regional bioethics network and obtain invaluable feedback from participants.

»»» "BIOETHICAL FRONTIERS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA" PODCAST

We are developing a podcast series entitled "Ethical Horizons: Navigating Bioethical Frontiers in Southeast Asia" jointly with some undergraduate law students from Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to further explore the multifaceted ethical landscape of Southeast Asia. In creating the podcasts, the students are given the opportunity to interact with leading scholars, researchers and practitioners from across the region and beyond as these experts offer invaluable insights into emerging ethical challenges. With a clear objective to promote dialogue and understanding, "Ethical Horizons" invites listeners to engage in discussions, challenge assumptions and explore solutions to pressing ethical issues.

»»» GFBR 2024 ESSAY COMPETITION

Our essay competition, with deadline for submission on 5 August 2024, is organised by the Network in collaboration with the Global Forum on Bioethics in Research 2024 (GFBR 2024). The competition invites students to delve into the ethical dimensions of research into health and climate change, addressing the need for ethical guidance in Malaysian policymaking and research endeavours. Emphasising diverse perspectives, including indigenous knowledge, essay participants will have the opportunity to examine ethical frameworks suitable for navigating the complex intersection of health and climate change.

»»» WORKSHOP AT UNIVERSITAS GADJAH MADA

The workshop will discuss in depth two important and current aspects of bioethics in the region, namely, the concept of Southeast Asia bioethics and the ethics of climate change in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs).

PAST EVENTS

»»» EXPLORING INNOVATION ETHICS AND OVERSIGHT: WORLD CONGRESS PANEL DISCUSSION

The panel commenced with insights from the 'Advancing Ethical Oversight of Artificial Intelligence (AI) - driven Health Research in Malaysia' meeting held in Kuala Lumpur in January 2024. Dr. Mohammad Firdaus Bin Abdul Aziz elaborated on the challenges faced by research ethics committees in evaluating AI research, emphasising the need for specialised expertise. Dr. Barry Solaiman and Dr. Angela Ballantyne shared their experiences in developing country-specific guidelines for AI research. Dr. Barry elaborated on the governance regulations for AI research in the Gulf Cooperative Council, specifically focusing on Qatar's regulations. Dr. Angela then followed up by discussing how AI guidelines in New Zealand were developed through consultation with the Maori community. Dr. Serene Ong broadened the discussion to the global landscape, exploring tensions between universal frameworks and moral pluralism, while introducing the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics. The session attracted a substantial audience and sparked engaging discussions.



»»» WEBINAR: DECOLONISATION OF BIOETHICS: LESSONS FOR SOUTHEAST ASIA

We had a stimulating and insightful discussion at our recent webinar on "Decolonisation of Bioethics: Lessons for Southeast Asia". Our panellists delved into crucial topics surrounding the intersection of decolonisation and EDI (equity, diversity and inclusion) initiatives in bioethics. We explored, among other areas, epistemic justice and the age-old debate of Asian vs. Western bioethics. The panellists also challenged the audience to reflect on whether decolonisation is necessary to advance bioethics in Southeast Asia and provided invaluable as well as positive ideas to stakeholders to move forward.



»»» INSIGHTS FROM THE SEA DREAM INCEPTION WORKSHOP

The recent Southeast Asia Developing Research Excellence and Mentorship (SEA DREAM) inception workshop, was held from 3rd to 5th April in Bangkok. Our Steering Committee member, Dr Voo Teck Chuan, shared our approach to setting up the SEA Bioethics Network and its challenges. As a representative of the Network and the SingHealth Duke-NUS Medical Humanities Institute, Dr Voo also highlighted the need for bioethics research to be integrated into health research in the region. For more information, visit: [Link to LinkedIn Post](#)



»»» INSIGHTS FROM WORKSHOP ON MIGRATION HEALTH IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: ETHICAL ISSUES AND OBLIGATIONS

The workshop on "Migration Health in Southeast Asia: Ethics and Obligations" was held in Bangkok, Thailand, in February 2024. The event brought to address the ethical complexities surrounding migrant healthcare access, delivery, and research. With the region witnessing a surge in migrant populations, our discussions underscored the indispensable role of ethics in addressing all aspects of migration, from policymaking to the experiences of migrants themselves. From refining taxonomies in migration health to exploring healthcare access barriers faced by vulnerable groups, such as migrant women and LGBTQI communities, our sessions navigated a wide array of critical topics. We also examined the ethical considerations of conducting research within migrant communities and delved into the challenges and solutions surrounding refugee health, particularly in the context of the Rohingya crisis. As we chart a course toward ethical excellence, a conceptual framework for ethical migrant health communication interventions was proposed, with the objective of guiding future efforts targeting migrant populations.



➤➤➤ FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES: SOUTHEAST ASIA BIOETHICS NETWORK GRANTS

The Network offers grants for the following categories of bioethics activity:

- Research Fellowship Grants
- Professional Growth Fellowship Grants
- Research Seed Grants
- Internship Grants

Our call for grant applications is now closed. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all applicants for their submissions. Our next grant call is scheduled for February 2025.



➤➤➤ ETHICS AND AI HEALTH RESEARCH

Our one-day Public Forum on "Ethics and AI Health Research," held on 24th January 2024, brought together esteemed panellists and experts in the field. It provided a platform to explore the ethical implications of AI in health research. The panellists delved into pressing topics surrounding the integration of AI technologies in healthcare, emphasising the importance of collaboration and the development of robust regulatory frameworks to ensure ethical AI implementation.



➤➤➤ ADVANCING ETHICS OVERSIGHT OF AI-DRIVEN HEALTH RESEARCH IN MALAYSIA

This two-day workshop on "Advancing Ethics Oversight of AI-Driven Health Research in Malaysia" was held from 22nd to 23rd January 2024. In collaboration with the Global Forum on Bioethics in Research (GFBR), we delved into the ethical dimensions of AI-driven health research, with a particular emphasis on LMICs. Participants actively engaged in conversations aimed at establishing innovative approaches to ethics oversight in AI-driven health research, addressing the unique challenges and opportunities presented by emerging technologies.



BIOETHICS NEWS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

»»» MYANMAR

IMPROVING CARE OF CHILDREN WITH CANCER: NETWORK OF SATELLITE CENTERS AND SHARED CARE IN MYANMAR

Myanmar is revolutionising paediatric cancer care through a network of satellite centers and shared care initiatives. This article delves into the bioethical considerations behind providing equitable access to treatment, especially for economically disadvantaged families. Learn how collaboration between primary treatment centres and satellite hospitals is improving treatment adherence and resilience during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters.

Read more: <https://www.who.int/southeastasia/news/detail/14-02-2024-improving-care-of-children-with-cancer-network-of-satellite-centers-and-shared-care-in-myanmar>



»»» THAILAND

THAILAND'S SUCCESS STORY PAVING THE WAY FOR UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE (UHC) ACROSS SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

Thailand's Universal Health Coverage (UHC) model, initiated in 2002 under the slogan "30 baht cures all diseases", highlighting how it has made comprehensive healthcare accessible and affordable for all Thai citizens. The model's success is attributed to stable financial support, a focus on primary healthcare, innovative delivery models, decentralisation and strong political commitment. Thailand's UHC has significantly reduced catastrophic health expenditures and poverty, serving as a global example of successful healthcare reform.

Read more: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/ht-insight/international-affairs/thailands-success-story-paving-the-way-for-uhc-across-south-and-southeast-asia-101708569063793.html>

HEALTH MINISTRY DENIES DATA LEAK INVOLVING 2.2M PATIENTS

Thailand's Public Health Ministry has denied a data leak involving the personal information of 2.2 million patients. Public Health Minister Cholnan Srikaew responded to allegations by the Rural Doctors Society (RDS) that patient data had been sold online. Dr. Cholnan assured that the ministry's systems are secure and the incident is being investigated in collaboration with the National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA).

Read more: <https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/2761458/health-ministry-denies-data-leak-involving-2-2m-patients>

THAILAND'S LEGAL WEED GOING UP IN SMOKE

Thailand's government plans to reverse its cannabis legalisation, threatening the closure of numerous licensed weed shops. This policy shift could impact Thailand's growing cannabis industry, which has attracted significant foreign investment and boosted the economy. Supporters argue for proper regulation rather than prohibition, highlighting cannabis's health benefits and economic potential.

Read more: <https://asiatimes.com/2024/05/thailands-legal-weed-going-up-in-smoke/>

VIETNAM

TELEMEDICINE IN VIETNAM: REGULATIONS AND THEIR IMPACT ON HEALTHCARE SERVICE PROVIDERS

Explore the implementation and impact of telemedicine in Vietnam, emphasising its benefits such as enhanced accessibility, improved chronic disease management, efficiency gains, and cost savings. The integration of telemedicine with existing healthcare systems and databases is highlighted, along with regulatory challenges, data security concerns and the shift towards value-based care models.

Read more: <https://www.ecovis.com/global/telemedicine-in-vietnam-regulations-and-their-impact-on-healthcare-service-providers/>



SINGAPORE

PEOPLE WITH HIV NO LONGER NEED TO INFORM SEXUAL PARTNERS OF INFECTION RISK IF 'UNDETECTABLE VIRAL LOAD' ARE MAINTAINED

Recent amendments to Singapore's Infectious Diseases Act regarding HIV requirement disclosure which aligns with medical advancements indicating that such individuals have effectively no risk of transmitting HIV. The amendments aim to encourage testing, treatment adherence and public health safeguards while distinguishing between responsible and irresponsible behaviors related to HIV transmission.

Read more: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/hiv-disclosure-undetectable-viral-loads-inform-partner-sexual-activity-moh-4177896>

CAMBODIA

LESSONS FROM THE PAST: CAMBODIA'S PATH TO GENOCIDE PREVENTION

Cambodia is actively working to prevent future genocides by learning from its past. The importance of integrating genocide education into the curriculum and providing comprehensive mental health services were emphasised focusing on memorialisation, education and healthcare to heal trauma and build resilience against future violence.

Read more: <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/lessons-from-the-past-cambodia-s-path-to-genocide-prevention>

▶▶▶ TIMOR-LESTE

IOM TIMOR-LESTE MARKS FOUR YEARS OF PROGRESS IN TUBERCULOSIS MANAGEMENT

Tackling tuberculosis (TB) amidst challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic through a comprehensive programme to strengthen active case detection and management, particularly in hard-to-reach communities. Learn how mobile health services, capacity-building initiatives and community education endeavours are contributing to improved TB prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

Read more: <https://roasiapacific.iom.int/news/iom-timor-leste-marks-four-years-progress-tuberculosis-management>

▶▶▶ MALAYSIA

AS MALAYSIA FACES CEDAW REVIEW, WOMEN REFUGEES CONTINUE TO STRUGGLE

As Malaysia undergoes a review by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), refugee women continue to face struggles. Without a legal framework for refugees, undocumented women risk arrest when seeking medical care. Despite Malaysia's claims of progress, many refugees still struggle with access to healthcare, employment and education, living in constant fear of detention. The government's response has been criticised for lacking transparency and not effectively addressing the refugees' needs.

Read more: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/22/as-malaysia-faces-cedaw-review-women-refugees-continue-to-struggle>



MALAYSIA COMING UP WITH AI GOVERNANCE AND CODE OF ETHICS

Spearheaded by collaborations such as YTL Power International Bhd with Nvidia Corp to introduce advanced AI infrastructure, Malaysia aims to regulate AI use responsibly and ethically. Highlighting the importance of balanced regulation that fosters innovation while addressing risks like algorithmic bias and privacy concerns with the need for inclusive dialogue and public engagement to shape effective regulations and build trust in AI technologies.

Read more: <https://www.nst.com.my/business/corporate/2024/01/998905/malaysia-coming-ai-governance-and-code-ethics>

MALAYSIA'S COMMITMENT TO THE RIGHT TO HEALTH

"My health, my right" underscores universal access to healthcare, education, clean environment and freedom from discrimination as essential for human dignity. Malaysia's approach includes infrastructure development, telemedicine initiatives and health education programs to enhance healthcare accessibility and quality. The government's commitment aims to ensure equitable healthcare access and proactive health management for all Malaysians.

Read more: <https://www.who.int/malaysia/news/detail/07-04-2024-malaysia-s-commitment-to-the-right-to-health>

»»» LAOS

LAO LABOUR MINISTRY CALLS FOR BETTER PROTECTION OF MIGRANT WORKERS

The Lao Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare is advocating for improved protection of migrant workers' rights. At the 7th Senior Labour Ministers Meeting on the Portability of Social Security for Migrant Workers in the CLMVT Countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam), they discussed safeguarding these workers' rights and the economic benefits their labor provide. The meeting focused on sharing experiences and practical solutions to enhance migrant worker protections across the region.

Read more: <https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2024/05/24/lao-labour-ministry-calls-for-better-protection-of-migrant-workers>



LAOS TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF HEALTHCARE SERVICES

Laos' Ministry of Health has adopted a new law to improve healthcare services. This legislation, endorsed in July 2023, aims to ensure access to essential public health services, from preventive measures to rehabilitation. The law establishes a framework for public health functions and coordinates health service delivery. The Ministry is also updating related laws on health insurance and medical products with support from the WHO and other partners.

Read more: <https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2024/03/27/laos-to-improve-quality-of-healthcare-services>



»»» INDONESIA

PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION: FOUNDATIONS OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN HEALTH SECTOR

Personal Data Protection (PDP) Law, aims to enhance governance frameworks and safeguard personal data. Digital literacy improvements to support initiatives like

Satusehat, a digital health ecosystem and also addresses potential risks and the need for robust data protection practices to prevent breaches, ensuring both individuals and health organisations are aware of their responsibilities under the PDP Law.

Read more: <https://www.pwc.com/id/en/media-centre/pwc-in-news/2024/english/foundations-of-digital-transformation-in-health-sector.html>

»»» PHILIPPINES

VAPE LAW PROMPTS CALLS FOR WHO POLICY SHIFT ON TOBACCO CONTROL

Philippines' groundbreaking "Vape Law" challenges traditional tobacco control strategies and sparks debate on the need for evidence-based policies.

Read more: <https://www.who.int/malaysia/news/detail/07-04-2024-malaysia-s-commitment-to-the-right-to-health>

KUDOS TO UNIVERSITI MALAYA LAW STUDENTS FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE

Heartfelt thanks to the following students from Universiti Malaya who assisted in identifying news items from across the region and beyond. Their dedication and keen insights were invaluable to our efforts. We deeply appreciate their commitment and hard work in helping us stay informed about the latest developments, ensuring that we have a comprehensive understanding of the news landscape. Their contributions have made a significant impact on our ability to keep our audience well-informed.



Gurdeep Kaur Maan | Parvaneetha | Lau Sing Ning | Lim Jit Yeng | David Lian Leu | Khoo Shinnie | Khueh Xian Cong
Wong Chi Ying | Rebecca Tan Sze Chern | Kum Yen Shia

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