# *Bioethics Digest*

*In this feature, our team provides you with an overview of the most recent publications in the field of bioethics, with a particular focus on contributions coming from (or having relevance for) Switzerland.*
*Buona lettura! Bonne lecture ! Viel Spass beim Lesen! Enjoy the reading!*

The editors: Andrea Martani, Maddalena Favaretto, and Felix Pageau

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## CLINICAL ETHICS



**"Solidarität und Verantwortung in der Pandemie"**

In this brief contribution published as a collaborative paper by several Swiss ethicists, it is argued that solidarity and responsibility should remain the guiding ethical principles in Swiss healthcare even in a (post-)pandemic time. More specifically, four points are formulated to guide the development of a better healthcare system in the next future. First, a reinforcement of primary healthcare, including better access to palliative care and psychological support. Second, protection of vulnerable (broadly speaking) groups, including medical but also social and work vulnerabilities (e.g. overworked and overexposed health personnel). Third, the development of fair triage and coordination procedures, both locally and nationally. And finally a sustainable financing, that covers both stationary and ambulatory care.

Albisser Schleger H, Baumann-Hlzle R, Krones T, Monteverde S, Schrmann J. Solidaritt und Verantwortung in der Pandemie. *Schweizerische Ärztezeitung*, 2021;102(05):165-167. doi: 10.4414/saez.2021.19512
The article is also available in French with this doi: 10.4414/bms.2021.19512

## DIGITAL ETHICS



**"Early Perceptions of COVID-19 Contact Tracing Apps in German-Speaking Countries: Comparative Mixed Methods Study"**
This study explicates how citizens of Austria, Germany and German-speaking Switzerland perceived contact-tracing apps at the beginning of the pandemic and compares such perceptions with media

coverage of the same topic in these countries. This research combines data from qualitative interviews and media-analysis, thus offering a comprehensive overview of the topic. Amongst the most interesting findings is the fact that in all three countries there was often a confusion between different tracking technologies (e.g. contact tracing apps vs. population level analysis of special data), and fears and hopes thereto related. The study also highlights some important differences between the contexts of these countries. For example, it shows that in Austria – where the contact-tracing app was launched very early and a high-profile politician made some controversial statements about potentially mandatory registration – the discussion in the newspapers and by interviewees showed particular concerns about surveillance. On the contrary, Germany and Switzerland introduced a contact-tracing app later and their press focussed more on international debates about the right technical structure for data storage of such apps.

Zimmermann BM, Fiske A, Prainsack B, Hangel N, McLennan S, Buyx A. Early Perceptions of COVID-19 Contact Tracing Apps in German-Speaking Countries: Comparative Mixed Methods Study. *J Med Internet Res*. 2021 Feb 8;23(2):e25525. doi: 10.2196/25525.


**"Value from health data: European opportunity to catalyse progress in digital health"**
In this short comment, the author presents a vision for the development of an ethical health data usage in Europe, especially in light of the EU initiative for creating a European Health Data Space (EHDS). After highlighting the three major challenges in this respect (uneven technical and governance standards, underdeveloped validation mechanisms of data-based technologies, and diverging interests of involved stakeholders), Vayena argues that the improvement of the digital health in Europe should be based on its fundamental values related to human rights. This requires respect for dignity, fairness, transparency, inclusion and especially accountability, which should not entail "mechanical checks in an opaque digital ecosystem, [but] rather an opportunity for all stakeholders to embrace responsibility and exercise good judgment".

Vayena E. Value from health data: European opportunity to catalyse progress in digital health
*The Lancet*. Published Online First: 8 February 2021. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(21)00203-8


**"Digital contact-tracing during the Covid-19 pandemic: An analysis of newspaper coverage in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland"**
In this article, another media analysis on the topic of contact-tracing apps is presented. The aim was to understand what aspects of this topic where covered in major newspapers and similar media outlet of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Using thematic analysis, the authors identified six themes: 1) discussions around the data-governance models that such apps could have; 2) the role of IT giants in the development of such apps; 3) issues relating the scientific rigour, including open access to the source-code of such apps; 4) the debate whether use should be mandatory or on a voluntary basis; 5) functional efficiency and technical limitations of apps, such as debates related to how many people should download the app to make it effective; and 6) the role of apps as compared to other public health measures. The authors then reflect on the multifaceted role of media coverage of the topic as compared to what other types of analysis (e.g. questionnaire) showed about public perceptions of contact tracing apps.

Amann J, Sleigh J, Vayena E (2021) Digital contact-tracing during the Covid-19 pandemic: An analysis of newspaper coverage in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. PLOS ONE 16(2): e0246524. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0246524