

Case Study – “But I’m Asymptomatic to the Virus!” Quarantine Ethics



By Ryan Pferdehirt, D.Bioethics, HEC-C

April 2020

Jane is 40-year-old physician who is travelling back from providing free medical care overseas. She has been stationed in South America, where a new virus is spreading. Very little is known about the virus, but it has been shown to be extremely contagious through the air. Jane arrives in the United States and is excited to be back after months away, particularly wanting to see her family. But at the airport, there is a mandatory quarantine of two weeks for all persons returning from the virus infected area. Jane tries to explain that she has been travelling for over 24 hours now and is completely asymptomatic. If she had the virus, she would have already started to show signs. Therefore, it is unnecessary for her to submit to the quarantine. The public health officials say it is a precaution, since not everything is known about the virus, and they cannot risk having her expose people here. Jane is extremely frustrated. While the public health officials discuss her situation, she sees an opportunity to sneak out an emergency exit and return to her family.

What should she do?