From the Front Lines: Trialing Research Ethics in the Time of Ebola
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Study/Objective: Focused on first-person accounts of clinical trials conducted during the West Africa Ebola outbreak, this study unpacks challenges and strategies for the ethical conduct of research during public health emergencies, adding evidence to existing recommendations for the ethical conduct of research in public health emergencies.

Background: Research conducted during the 2014-15, West Africa Ebola outbreak presented a number of documented, ethical and practical challenges. Alongside the recruitment and consenting of participants amongst patients subject to isolation and quarantine, research involved the testing of unproven agents with no known alternative. Research occurred in the context of widespread fear, distrust of hospitals, foreigners, vaccines, and/or local authorities. It involved a little, understood Level 4 Pathogen. The Ebola research context presented the coexistence of all these challenges in one research context, and the possibility – due to the number and variety of studies carried out in three countries – to compare experiences and innovations to the challenges of upholding ethical standards during an emergency of this scale.

Methods: Data was gathered through Skype and in-person semi-structured interviews (N = 110) with stakeholders directly involved in research at trial sites in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia (as survivors, proxy decision-makers local and international research ethics board members members, research and Ebola Treatment/Management Center staff).

Results: Different trials and trial contexts presented some similar, but also unique ethical challenges. Examined in depth are directly engaging ethical and practical experiences and challenges, with no known alternative. Research occurred in the context of widespread fear, distrust of hospitals, foreigners, vaccines, and/or local authorities. It involved a little, understood Level 4 Pathogen. The Ebola research context presented the coexistence of all these challenges in one research context, and the possibility – due to the number and variety of studies carried out in three countries – to compare experiences and innovations to the challenges of upholding ethical standards during an emergency of this scale.

Conclusion: This study builds on a growing body of knowledge directly engaging ethical and practical experiences and challenges, of conducting ethical research during public health emergencies.

Moral Entanglement and the Ethics of Closing Humanitarian Medical Aid Projects
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Study/Objective: We aim to clarify the obligations that humanitarian medical organizations hold towards recipients of aid when a decision is made to end a humanitarian project.

Background: Humanitarian organizations and their staff regularly make and implement decisions to close projects.