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OPINION | LETTERS

Triage Is the Moral Choice in an Emergency

No one wants to make them, but the choice to provide a ventilator to a patient with a poor prognosis is simultaneously a choice to deny it to someone else who might benefit more.

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Everyone I know on the front lines of the Covid-19 pandemic has approached the inevitable ethical dilemmas with reason and integrity, as well as caution and humility. Allen C. Guelzo's strident opinions rest solely on the invocation of an alternate reality, which he then lobs as a criticism of hardworking and morally thoughtful ethicists and clinicians who have to live in trenches of real-world scarcity ("Rationing Care Is a Surrender to Death," op-ed, March 27).



ILLUSTRATION: DAVID KLEIN

Mr. Guelzo suggests we can avoid rationing by simply manufacturing more ventilators. But hospitals, much like professors' offices, aren't ventilator factories. Manufacturing is, at best, a solution for weeks and months ahead. Many hospitals are running out of ventilators and ICU beds as I write this. Hard decisions will have to be made. No one wants to make them, but the choice to provide a ventilator to a patient with a poor prognosis is simultaneously a choice to deny it to someone else who might benefit more. That is the situation of scarcity in a pandemic.

No amount of imagining it to be otherwise will solve the moral dilemmas faced by physicians and ethicists.

It's easy to say that we don't have to make those tough choices. But unless Mr. Guelzo has a solution for getting more ventilators to hospitals and the highly skilled people to monitor and operate them, not in weeks or months, but right this minute, then he would do well not to add to the moral distress of those who have stepped forward to make those hard and necessary decisions.

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