

Correspondence

The possible threat of faking Covid-19 diagnostic tests and vaccination certifications: a call to an immediate action

ABSTRACT

The pandemic's recessive effect on the global economy created a 'de-globalized' process that detrimentally causes financial turmoil to countries whose economy depends on tourism, urban passenger transport services and civil aviation, among others. The need to help the most vulnerable industries non-resilient to the pandemic reopen to aid economic recovery amid the pandemic's threat is a very urgent concern. With the move to start the vaccination program against the threat of Covid-19, faking Covid-19 diagnostic testing certification pose a severe problem to matters of ethics and economics. If not taken seriously, falsifying documents that certify a person who has undergone Covid-19 vaccination could also happen. This paper argues that everyone's collective effort could be the real embodiment of hope toward a new normal world immune from the virus and malpractices.

Keywords Covid-19 diagnostic tests, fraudulence, social responsibility, vaccination certification

The Covid-19 vaccination program's implementation gives 'hope for a brighter future'¹ since the pandemic began. In a recent article published by the World Economic Forum, the pandemic is reported to affect the economy worldwide significantly.² Since the pandemic outbreak, business sectors that offered human-contact-related services and manufactured products through the human-involved process were the most affected economic sectors. As an unfortunate inevitable consequence, business establishments had to stop, thereby causing an economic recession. The decline of economic activity during the Covid-19 pandemic causes the employment rate to markdown, the cost-of-living increases. Indeed, the need to help industries that are 'most vulnerable and non-resilient to the pandemic'³ reopen to aid economic recovery amid the pandemic's threat is a very urgent concern.

Although innovative business practices like engaging in a 'digital economy'⁴ should assist, if not replace the traditional way, there are business sectors that involve physical contact services. Because of the strict health protocol limiting human movement, these business sectors cannot fully recover from the financial recession. To help resolve the issue, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, among other health-related agencies, issued preventive health measure guidelines

to aid industries in reopening the business to the general public to 'ensure safe and healthful working condition'.⁵ As of this writing, there are 106 555 206 confirmed cases and 2 333 446 deaths of Covid-19 worldwide,⁶ making Covid-19 still a deadly threat. Hence, maximum health standards measures must be in place.

Two particular health measures that secured the industry to reopen, especially for business transactions involving traveling, are the mandatory Covid-19 diagnostic testing and 14-day quarantine. Recent studies found that said practices help control the spread of Covid-19 infection.^{7,8} However, isolated cases of malpractice of faking Covid-19 diagnostic testing certification are reported in some countries, including the Philippines⁹ and India.¹⁰ The fraudulent act may pose serious concern for matters of ethics and economics. On the one hand, it is an ethical concern since it involves lying and dishonesty. On the other hand, it would disrupt the recovering global economy because it would create another wave of Covid-19 infection since the virus's asymptomatic carrier would be allowed to travel using a fraudulent document freely.

Later, if not taken seriously, falsifying documents that certify a person who has undergone Covid-19 vaccination

could happen. As purported by a recent editorial article of this journal, the Covid-19-related issue ‘should be answered by society as a whole as we are all involved and not left to politicians or doctors’.¹¹ The solution required sharing of responsibilities. The government authorities have a moral and legal duty to protect the general public from such an unethical and illegal act. The government’s intervention must include implementing preventive measures to resist this potential malpractice of utilizing fraudulent Covid-19 diagnostic tests and vaccination certifications. At the same time, the general public must also take their share of accountability. With the alarming recession of the global economy, individuals must exercise their social responsibility to avoid and report any fraudulent acts related to Covid-19 tests, vaccines and treatment to the legal authorities. As argued by a recent article of this journal, ‘public health must be grounded in ethical virtues’.¹² Everyone’s collective effort could be the real embodiment of hope toward a new normal world immune from the virus and malpractices.

Author’s Contribution

All authors contributed to all aspects of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this paper.

References

- 1 International Banker. What a Covid-19 vaccine means for the global economic recovery. <https://internationalbanker.com/finance/what-a-covid-19-vaccine-means-for-the-global-economic-recovery/> (5 February 2021, date last accessed).
- 2 World Economic Forum. These 8 charts show how the global economy is coping with Covid-19. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/01/global-economy-covid-vaccine-charts/> (5 February 2021, date last accessed).
- 3 Inquirer.Net. Sectors that not only survived, but thrived during the pandemic. <https://business.inquirer.net/313404/sectors-that-not-only-survived-but-thrived-during-the-pandemic> (5 February 2021, date last accessed).
- 4 Philippine News Agency. Asia-Pacific businesses press for unified action vs. pandemic. <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1130312> (5 February 2021, date last accessed).
- 5 OSHA. Guidance on Preparing Workplace for Covid-19. <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf> (5 February 2021, date last accessed).
- 6 World Health Organization. WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard. <https://covid19.who.int/> (11 February 2021, date last accessed).
- 7 Jung J, Jang H, Kim HK *et al.* The importance of mandatory COVID-19 diagnostic testing prior to release from quarantine. *J Korean Med Sci* 2020;**35**(34):e314. doi: 10.3346/jkms.2020.35.e314.
- 8 Wells CR, Townsend JP, Pandey A *et al.* Optimal COVID-19 quarantine and testing strategies. *Nat Commun* 2021;**12**(1):1–9. doi: 10.1038/s41467-020-20742-8.
- 9 Philippine News Agency. 3 of 6 Boracay tourists who faked Covid-19 swab tested positive. <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1129541>. (5 February 2021, date last accessed).
- 10 The NEWS Minute. Passengers to Gulf fall prey to fake Covid-19 certificate scam by Kerala lab. <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/passengers-gulf-fall-prey-fake-covid-19-certificate-scam-kerala-lab-134403>. (5 February 2021, date last accessed).
- 11 Neil K. The Collateral Damage of COVID-19. *J Public Health* December 2020;**42**(4):659.
- 12 Del Castillo FA. Virtues in public health: easing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. *J Public Health* January 2021; advance article. doi: 10.1093/pubmed/fdaa245.

Melona C. Deguma, and Jabin J. Deguma
College of Education, Cebu Technological University, M.J.
Cuenco Ave., Cebu City, Cebu, 6000, Philippines

Address correspondence to Jabin J. Deguma,
Email: jabin.deguma@ctu.edu.ph
doi: 10.1093/pubmed/fdab054