There are crazier ideas than harsh, indefinite lockdowns to fight the coronavirus. One was proposed by a bioethics professor: Put mind-controlling hormones in the water supply to make people more cooperative.

Conspiracy theorists who oppose the fluoridation of drinking water claim that fluoride is added not to strengthen teeth but to allow for mind control. According to the "theory," fluoride damages the brain and makes a person more susceptible to control by others, like the government. Of course, it's complete nonsense.

But now, thanks to a medical ethics professor, conspiracy theorists can point to a real person who really suggested fighting coronavirus by tainting the water supply with a chemical that makes people more cooperative. In other words, he thinks a benevolent form of mind control could help us defeat COVID-19. Here are excerpts of what Prof. Parker Crutchfield wrote in The Conversation:

But I believe society may be better off, both in the short term as well as the long, by boosting not the body's ability to fight off disease but the brain's ability to cooperate
with others. What if researchers developed and delivered a moral enhancer rather than an immunity enhancer?

Moral enhancement is the use of substances to make you more moral. The psychoactive substances act on your ability to reason about what the right thing to do is, or your ability to be empathetic or altruistic or cooperative.

Another challenge is that the defectors who need moral enhancement are also the least likely to sign up for it. As some have argued, a solution would be to make moral enhancement compulsory or administer it secretly, perhaps via the water supply. [Emphasis added]

Let's set aside the fact that this is bat s#!t crazy and focus on two gigantic problems.

First, administering a mind-altering substance to a person without his knowledge or consent is highly unethical. It boggles my mind that an ethicist could come to any other conclusion. (Funnily enough, he cites himself when he claims that "some have argued" that moral enhancement should be administered secretly.)

Second, we already have tested extensively drugs that are supposed to alter thoughts and behavior. They're called antidepressants. And a lot of them suck. For some people, antidepressants are no better than placebo or have only modest effects. The same would almost certainly be true of "moral enhancers" like the hormone oxytocin. There's also the problem of side effects, which the author does acknowledge.

### Can Any Treatment Be Made Compulsory?

This is a tricky question. We at ACSH are not keen on forcing people to do things. But there are a handful of situations in which the "evil" of forcing people to act is preferable to the "evil" of a laissez-faire approach that can result in widespread harm.

Take vaccines, for instance. Dr. Josh Bloom and I [3] (as well as Dr. Ethan Siegel and I [4]) have argued that some vaccines, such as for highly infectious diseases like measles for which an extremely effective vaccine exists, should be compulsory. Why? Because without a high level of herd immunity, outbreaks occur, putting the immunocompromised and babies too young to be vaccinated at risk. It doesn't make as much sense to mandate flu vaccines (or perhaps even COVID vaccines), as they are not always highly effective. (That's not an excuse [5] to skip them!)

Another area that probably requires mandatory treatment is mental illness, but only in those cases in which a person becomes a threat to himself or to society. The homelessness crisis is in large part driven by untreated mental illness, and these patients are vulnerable to disease and being victims of crime.
Mandatory anything should be approached with the utmost caution. However, as I wrote previously [6], the following must be a guiding principle:

> Free markets and the notion of individual liberty are predicated upon the belief that humans are rational and responsible. Once rationality and responsibility no longer factor into a person's thinking, society must consider intervening, not just for the good of the individual but for the protection of society as a whole.

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**Links**