Surgical Ethics in the Time of COVID-19

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, hospitals throughout the US and the world have had to shift priorities to care for large numbers of patients infected with Coronavirus. As a result, surgeons were forced to shift their priorities from treating their individual patients to considering what is best for public health. Many patients had their operations cancelled or postponed. For patients whose surgery could not be postponed, surgeons were forced to disclose to patients the many unknown risks of having surgery if one was COVID positive. The decision making about which cases to cancel and which to proceed with were complex requiring considerations of patient risk, surgical and anesthesia personnel risk, and resource utilization. Considerations of these multiple issues along with the challenges of informed consent for non-emergency surgery during the COVID-19 pandemic will be considered.