



COMMENTARY

A Healthcare Providers View: Taking the Covid Vaccine - A Selfish or Selfless Act?

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Abstract

Healthcare practitioners take an oath to do-no-harm to those we serve and help to protect against health illnesses. The Covid-19 virus is an illness that has potential deadly consequences. With the development of the Covid-19 vaccine there is new found hope against this deadly virus. Taking the vaccine is a personal choice but providers must weight their personal feelings against those sworn duties to help treat and protect the public and society at large. Taking the vaccine is a selfless act and one that upholds these health care values and principles to support neighbors, communities, and society as a whole.

Keywords

Covid-19, Covid vaccine, Health care practitioners, Occupational therapy, Hippocratic oath, Healthcare policies

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A selfish act or a selfless act? – that is the question. As if healthcare providers do not have enough diseases to worry about, in marches the Covid-19 virus. After a year of sickness and death from Covid in 2020, Operation Warp Speed ushered in the rollout of the Covid-19 vaccine in 2021 [1]. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS] [2], the covid-19 vaccines will stop the spread of the virus and end the pandemic. With promotion from the Centers for Disease Control [CDC] [3], slowly, people volunteered to take the vaccine, with the current number vaccinated being almost 47 million; healthcare providers were among some of the first. Still, 29% of healthcare providers are hesitant to take the vaccine due to personal fear, misinformation, or a lack of trust [1].

Taking the covid vaccine is an act of moral courage and selflessness. Imagine being the very first person to roll up the sleeve and take the vaccine. As a healthcare provider who works closely with patients and other providers as part of the healthcare team, it is a moral and ethical duty to prioritize others' welfare. Not to say that a providers ownself-care is not important but equally as important as others. The term "do-no-harm" refers to the Hippocratic oath that has long pointed to the healthcare community values and ethics [4]. Although updated to meet today's healthcare practice needs and society's changed values [4], many providers raise their hands to still recite the oath upon graduation from healthcare educational programs.

Further, in allied health care fields and in particular the field of occupational therapy (OT), practitioners pledge to support and abide by OT core values which include altruism [5]. Altruism is "demonstrating concern for the welfare of others" (AOTA, 2015, Core Values section) [5]. Occupational therapists strive to practice under the principles and standards of conduct of the OT healthcare field when addressing issues that can affect the patients I serve. The first OT principle is beneficence, which includes behaviors that "demonstrate a concern for the well-being and safety" of others (AOTA, 2015, Principles and Standards of Conduct section) [5]. Taking the covid vaccine is an act of selflessness and the right thing to do to help keep patients and co-workers safe.

Currently, there is no mandate from the U.S. government that requires healthcare providers (or anyone else for that matter) to take the covid vaccination despite the high rate of recorded transmissions of the

virus [6]. Gostin, et al. [7] suggested that providers are at a higher risk of contracting the virus and subsequently passing it on to patients and other providers. Healthcare organizations must have policies in place, such as infection control processes, to ensure safe environments [7]. Thus, organizations have to consider whether it is ethical to mandate the vaccine given it was approved under the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA). The EUA could allow the vaccines to be used before full Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval if deemed an emergency due to the pandemic [8]. However, the EUA act is unclear leaving it questionable if organizations can mandate the vaccine for employees and customers [8]. The lack of mandating the vaccine at the organizational level leaves the decision to take the vaccine or not to the individual provider, leading to an unsafe environment for vulnerable individuals, placing them at significant risk of contracting the virus. This conflict between policy and ethics can be the perfect storm to allow the covid-19 pandemic to linger and more deaths to occur.

With the quickness of the rollout of the vaccine comes questions. Many people have concerns about vaccine safety, efficacy, and dangers and are reluctant to take the vaccine due to a general distrust of healthcare and governmental policies [1]. The CDC [9] reported that the vaccine's benefits to society far outweigh the risk and the safety aspect is a top prioritizing health related issues. Some of the vaccine's reported benefits are to keep individuals from getting covid-19, build protection from virus-related complications and build immunity, and help stop the pandemic from spreading [9]. The more people vaccinated, the greater the immunity in society. Wallis [1] reported that 60 to 90 percent of society must be vaccinated or carry antibodies resulting from the previous infection to reach herd immunity. By exhibiting the courage to take the vaccine despite fears, and misconceptions, others will see little to no harm occurs or minimal to very little possible ill effects happen encouraging them to follow suite. In fact, the CDC [10] reported that only 11 people out of one million have an allergic reaction to the vaccine. Less than 0.2% of people who have taken the Pfizer vaccine, have had non-life threatening reactions and have fully recovered [10]. This modeled courage and behavior, in turn, will help them to be more comfortable with the vaccination and be less afraid. Having the moral courage to overcome the fear of possible complications from the vaccine and trusting the evidence being reported by the government can help healthcare providers make the right choice to take the vaccine.

Healthcare leaders should model moral courage by taking the vaccine, upholding their oath to do-no-harm, protecting others, and placing their patients' welfare and co-workers' health and well-being first and foremost. When healthcare organizations offered the vaccine to providers, many volunteered at the risk

of being scoffed at by others who did not understand the health benefits versus disadvantages and expressed fears by some including those in the medical field and public arena. Standing up for higher values and beliefs takes courage and can bring on emotional unease [11]. However, believing it is never the wrong thing to do the right thing gives courage to overcome social fears. As practitioners work closely with vulnerable patients and are a part of healthcare teams across the nation, it is important to join millions of other Americans and take the vaccine. Taking the vaccine gives practitioners the tools and courage to have hard conversations with those providers who are hesitant to take the vaccine. Sharing personal experiences of the positive effects of the vaccine and advocating for its use among providers and co-workers will ultimately ensure the protection from the virus for us all. Taking the vaccine is a selfless act; not getting the vaccine is a selfish act. For many in the healthcare field, there is no question on the sacrifice and devotion to the health and welfare of others we are meant to serve and protect.

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