

To All My Fellow Employees, Colleagues, and Healthcare providers and associates:

Whether we realize it or not our calling is to provide physical, emotional, and spiritual sustenance. Sometimes we wish we could provide a bit more than we are able to. It is not easy to be caregivers. Whether you work in Dietary, Housekeeping, Environmental Services, or Nursing or Administration we are all directly or indirectly having an impact on the wellbeing of fellow members of our community as they may be nearing the end their lives. As one of my patients recently told me “Getting old is not for wimps”. Aging can be discomfoting and scary for some and anything we can do to eliminate the uncertainty and fear is a blessing to them.

As we look at the number of people who have died from Covid-19 across our country we see that almost half of them have been nursing home patients. With all the problems we have had with Covid-19 we all know it can be a deadly disease in the elderly and debilitated. It really can be fear inducing to feel as though you do not know if the person talking to you behind the mask has Covid-19, so anything we can do to allay their fear is something we should try to do.

I have seen 2 of my patients who had it once and they contracted it again and died from the second infection. Remember that due to their age they may have trouble making enough antibodies to fight a second infection. As caregivers, the best way to ensure there is not another endemic spread of Covid-19 is to immunize ourselves to prevent us from bringing it into our work.

There really is no substitute for immunization.

Some people are also concerned that this vaccine was made too quickly and not tested enough. Usually, vaccines take years to make because there is a small number of researchers working with a limited budget trying to produce a vaccine and it takes a longer period of time. Testing it takes a long time as well since they must advertise for volunteers, and it takes a long time to find as many as they need to prove it works and is safe. With Covid-19 there was a massive amount of money and people thrown at the problem and they were able to develop the vaccine quickly and there was no shortage of volunteers willing to test the vaccine.

Many people are afraid there will be side effects. As with many vaccines there may be some discomfort and muscle aches or mild fever for some of the people after the second or booster dose but that is expected because it is telling you your immune system is working and our body is increasing its production of the anti-virus. The latest scare is the press coverage of anaphylactic reactions that occur after immunizations which is rare but makes good press. To date there have been about 11 severe reactions out of more than 2.1 million people in the United States who have received a dose of the vaccine. This represents about 1 in 190,000 doses administered. There also have been no deaths. It is a higher rate than most vaccines but when you compare it to the deaths caused by Covid-19 by age groups we find that for community dwelling people 60 and older there is a 1 in 58 chance of death. For people between the ages of 40 and 59, it was about one in 833, and for people younger than 40 it was about one in 10,000. For those who were not white, the fatality rate was more than three times that for whites.

For this reason, I recommend people who have had anaphylactic reactions in the past talk to their physicians about whether to get the vaccine or not. For everyone else it is safe, but you may have some discomfort after the second dose.

I do not know about you, but I would much rather take the 1 in 190,000 chance of a non-fatal reaction than a 1 in 58, or a 1 in 833, or a 1 in 10,000 chance of death. And that doesn't even include the morbidity caused by Covid-19. There have been several people with clotting abnormalities, neurologic and cardiac side effects, and the latest is psychotic episodes.

Please strongly consider taking the vaccine to prevent catching the virus and spreading it to the people you love and to the people you take care of.

Sincerely,

Lee Fagre, MD, 11 January 2021