

# Physicians will play key role building trust in COVID-19 vaccine

DEC 15, 2020

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The hardships of the past year will remain with us far into the future. But we enter 2021 with much hope and optimism that COVID-19 vaccines will bring an end to this devastating pandemic and restore some sense of normalcy to our lives.

With the eyes of the world watching, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) honored their long-standing commitments to a rigorous, evidence-based and transparent vaccine authorization and recommendation for use process in record time. There is simply no way to overstate how remarkable and thorough this vaccine process has been, considering the extraordinarily high stakes involved.

It is important to note that the U.S. vaccine authorization and recommendation for use process involves external advisory groups at both the FDA, the Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee, and CDC, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, who make recommendations to the FDA and CDC directors, respectively.

We thank the FDA and CDC for keeping physicians informed and updated about the process as it moved along at record pace, and for not compromising their high standards for reviewing the safety and efficacy data collected during multiple-phase trials. Our AMA recognizes ACIP recommendations as the standard physicians should follow in making vaccine-related decisions with their patients.

## Vaccine ambassadors

Now that nationwide distribution and administration have begun, physicians take on an active vital role as vaccine ambassadors. Experience has shown us that our patients place great faith in a strong, positive recommendation from a physician, and that the information and education provided by physicians and other health care professionals results in higher vaccine acceptance rates.

Our AMA will play its part by providing you and your patients with information about the vaccine, fully communicating the benefits and risks to assist in shared and informed decision-making. Our goal is

help you get all of your questions answered so that you can address and answer any of your patients questions and concerns, dispel misinformation, and build greater confidence in COVID-19 vaccination.

In building that confidence, it is particularly important to note that the organizers of the U.S. clinical trials of COVID-19 vaccine candidates have made a conscious effort to represent the broad range of demographic groups that comprise our population when enrolling trial participants. This is significant for several reasons, not the least of which is the fact that Black, Latino and other historically marginalized populations have been disproportionately impacted by the virus. Inclusiveness and equity in these trials will also foster trust in the vaccines as they become widely available going forward.

Mistrust of the medical system with the Black community is a legitimate issue rooted in historical experience, and instilling confidence in science, vaccines, and the distribution process will remain a top priority in the weeks and months ahead. Our AMA is embracing this effort in concert with the nation's public health system and our allies in government, the media and organizations dedicated to serving marginalized communities.

Building trust in the scientific process that has yielded these vaccine formulations, and working to restore the public's trust in public health institutions like the FDA and CDC, are key considerations in overcoming vaccine hesitancy and achieving a level of herd immunity that protects the most vulnerable and at-risk in our communities.

## **Public health, not politics**

The first step toward earning that trust is to strip away the politicization, and stop the flow of disinformation, that have surrounded COVID-19 this past year. Instead, we need to emphasize the fact that vaccine development in our nation is a rigorous, nonpartisan process rooted in evidence and scientific protocols, and that clinical trials for COVID-19 vaccine candidates have included members of minoritized communities to ensure safety and efficacy for all patients.

Our AMA has consistently taken a nonpartisan stance throughout the COVID-19 crisis while advocating for and emphasizing policies and actions grounded in science and evidence. At the same time, we have and will continue to reject political pressure or any other outside influence that disrupts the pursuit of objective science and data.

The earliest stages of vaccine administration may have arrived, but our vigilance against the spread of this devastating virus must be more vigorous than ever. While a safe and effective vaccine has, indeed, arrived, we must caution our patients against celebrating the pandemic's end far too soon. We must continue to urge them to wear masks, wash their hands and maintain safe physical distancing.



We may all see the end of the pandemic on the horizon, but we are not there yet. And we can't afford to give up any ground against this merciless adversary.

Continuing to take the precautions proven to limit the spread of this virus will be just as important to ending this pandemic as an effective vaccine. We need both if we are to realize the beginning of the end of this terrible chapter in our history.