As over 300 million Americans sign up for spots in the COVID-19 vaccination queue, pharmaceutical manufacturers are struggling to produce enough vaccine and the equipment to deliver the injections. But even as they make progress, new challenges await, according medical and public health leaders.

Anthony Fauci, MD, recently appointed chief medical adviser to the Biden administration, said states could expect a 16% increase in vaccine allotments very soon and also increasing the total doses available by the end of the year.

Originally contracted for 200 million doses each, vaccine manufacturers Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna have agreed to provide 100 million more doses each, he said. Even more vaccine doses are likely to be available soon from Johnson & Johnson and other manufacturers that could see their vaccine candidates earn emergency use authorization.

The AMA recognizes the critical importance of scientific integrity, transparency, and public trust in the fight to contain the global spread of COVID-19 and plan for the authorization, distribution and administration of COVID-19 vaccines. Stay updated with the AMA on COVID-19 and vaccine development.

Search for equity

However, Dr. Fauci noted that there is still plenty of work to be done to get the vaccine to at-risk populations in an equitable manner, “not just people who can get on a computer, or who can walk into a drugstore that is around the corner from them. I am talking about putting up community vaccine centers” and mobile vaccination units to serve people who don’t usually have easy access to healthcare.
Dr. Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, spoke at a panel discussion “The Challenge of Our Time: COVID-19 Vaccine,” sponsored by political news website The Hill.

The panel was moderated by Steve Clemons, The Hill’s editor-at-large. The first panel session addressed the ongoing issues of vaccine manufacturing and the second session covered distribution issues.

The speakers addressed the future of COVID-19 vaccine development and the needs of the country for the rest of 2021.

One of the panelists was Mikael Dolsten, MD, PhD, chief scientific officer at Pfizer. Dr. Dolsten predicted the delivery of about 2 billion does of vaccines in 2021, a testament to the accelerated manufacturing processes and new technology, allowing for vaccination of 300 million Americans. However, he said a booster may be necessary in one or two years as the virus mutates and immunity evaporates.

Coping with vaccine hesitancy

How well is the country getting vaccines into the arms of people? That remains a challenge, but Susan R. Bailey, MD, president of the AMA, said the new administration is making progress.

However, while shipping doses around the country can be part of a national plan, administration of vaccinations in a local task that calls for local communication programs to ease the anxiety of people who fear the process. The federal government needs to work with states and local jurisdictions to understand what their unique problems are and to help them succeed at distribution, she said.

“Getting vaccines into arms is definitely a local process,” she said, noting that there are many communities that are distrustful, particularly communities of color, Native American communities and others. “Vaccine hesitancy was a problem before COVID but now it has reached a fever pitch.”

Public health officials need to develop clear and consistent messages that can alleviate that hesitancy. “There’s no question that communication and education is going to be a critical part of this,” she said.

Learn with the AMA about three ways physicians can help combat COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy.