Tripledemic ramps up need for clear, constant scientific communication

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When Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, MD, PhD, MAS, recently interviewed Anthony Fauci, MD—outgoing head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases—one on one, the two talked about Dr. Fauci’s nearly 40-year career in that role. He covered the highs and lows of advising seven presidents and the ongoing challenges presented during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For Dr. Bibbins-Domingo—editor-in-chief of JAMA® and JAMA Network™—what stuck out to her most about the conversation was Dr. Fauci’s advice when it comes to communicating scientific information to individuals who are not receptive to the information being shared.

"He says we have to just keep going out there and talking about it," Dr. Bibbins-Domingo noted. "I love the simplicity of the way he said it—that we have to just keep pushing forward. The science tells us what we have to do to keep healthy. We have to keep talking about it with our patients, with our community—the people we talk to on a day-to-day basis. I thought it was quite compelling."

Dr. Bibbins-Domingo recounted that advice as part of a larger conversation about challenges facing physicians in a recent episode of “AMA Update.”

The arrival of a “tripledemic”

“Pandemic” is a word that's become common parlance since March 2020. Nearly three years later, the nation is being introduced to the word “tripledemic,” thanks to early increases in seasonal influenza, a sharp rise in cases of respiratory syncytial virus infection (RSV), and the continued bout against COVID-19.
Dealing with influenza and RSV is not something new to clinicians, Dr. Bibbins-Domingo said. Dealing with such a sharp uptick along with COVID-19 cases is.

"RSV and flu are things that we're used to dealing with at this time of the year," she said. "But the fact of all of the protections we had in place for the last two years in the pandemic meant we probably didn't see the full brunt of these. And so we are seeing them now."

The best way to mitigate continuing high numbers is to promote vaccinations, Dr. Bibbins-Domingo said. She reiterated that effective vaccines exist for influenza and COVID-19 and that it's important for individuals to stay up-to-date on their vaccinations.

"We have a lot of people in the country vaccinated, but we have a strikingly small number of people who've gotten their boosters," she said. "What I am particularly concerned about is making sure ... those who are most vulnerable to illness are getting those protective, preventative measures in place."

Helping spread the word

Dr. Bibbins-Domingo said one of the biggest obstacles to seeing more of the public get vaccinated comes down to communication. That is why *JAMA* and the JAMA Network is focused on expanding how its content is being distributed.

In addition to its print publications, *JAMA* and the JAMA Network is putting an added emphasis on examining ways to use multimedia to create and share informative and compelling content.

"The reality is people consume information best when you're meeting them where they are," she said. "They're more likely to be receptive if they're consuming information on a platform they're used to consuming information from."

In a statement issued last month, the AMA joined 11 other physician and health-professional societies to “strongly recommend that everyone who is eligible, especially those at higher risk, urgently receive their updated COVID-19 booster (or COVID-19 primary series if not yet vaccinated) and influenza vaccine.”

The organizations said they “expect that the updated COVID-19 vaccine will help reduce severe illness, hospitalizations and death for our most vulnerable patients, including older adults, those who are pregnant and recently pregnant, and those from historically minoritized communities.”

In a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention news briefing this month, internist Sandra A. Fryhofer, MD, also urged Americans to get their COVID-19 vaccine boosters.

URL: https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/tripledemic-ramps-need-clear-constant-scientific-communication

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“We all have booster fatigue, but understand you could get really, really sick this year and ruin your holiday celebrations if you don’t get vaccinated,” said Dr. Fryhofer, chair of the AMA Board of Trustees, adding that “our hospital systems continue to be stretched with high numbers of patients with other respiratory illnesses.”

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