



Covid-19 Vaccine- A Ray of Hope

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE: Sana Iqbal, Covid-19 Vaccine- A Ray of Hope, J Res Med Dent Sci, 2021, 9 (4): 431-432.

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Received: 25/03/2021

Accepted: 21/04/2021

EDITORIAL

Covid -19 pandemic has been a nightmare for the entire world since December 2019 [1]. This pandemic has been associated with a high rate of mortality [2]. With Pakistan having begun its first stage of Covid-19 vaccinations, a mass awareness program about the need, efficacy, and safety of the vaccines is important. Even in these early days, there has been some confusion about whether the populace should be vaccinated or what is the effective vaccine with minimal side effects? Chinese Sinopharm vaccine is safe for those over 60 years of age. The Ministry of Health, however, has explained that the vaccine is not being administered to doctors above 60 as the data for Sinopharm is not available for trial candidates in that age bracket. While these are important explanations, the Government of Pakistan must put careful thought and resources into a public-awareness drive. Across the world, vaccine skepticism has been an enormous challenge even before Covid-19.

A December 2020 survey conducted jointly by data-gathering company Ipsos and the World Economic Forum discovered that the country most suspicious of the Covid-19 vaccine is France, which has been a vaccine-skeptical nation even before the coronavirus struck. The survey, which was taken by thirteen thousand and five hundred people in fifteen countries, revealed that only 40 % of adults in France intended to get the vaccine. The maximum number of people intended to be inoculated against the virus

recognized in China, where 80pc agreed that they would get the vaccine if it were available. One of the main reasons behind vaccine refusal, the survey revealed, was the concern of side effects, followed by doubts about its efficacy. Some respondents said they would refuse as they felt they were not at risk of contracting the virus, while a lower percentage said they are against vaccines in general [3].

Pakistan is no exception when it comes to vaccine skepticism. The polio vaccination program for years has been marred by refusals and even violence due to misguided beliefs about polio drops. As a result, Pakistan remains one of the last two countries left where the virus has not been eradicated [4,5].

The government ought to consider these realities and address, not just the skeptics but also those who do not have access to information about the global vaccination drive. With the revival of coronavirus cases in the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic tearing in Pakistan, the management of the vaccination program leaves a lot to be desired that how critical an effective vaccination strategy is to defeat the virus. With infection rates rising, the subsequent decision by the National Command and Control Centre (NCC) to impose restrictions has been highlighted once again. The directives include a two-week spring vacation in educational institutions in ten cities as well as smart lockdowns. Offices and institutions can have fifty percent employees at a time. Though these decisions are much needed, they will disrupt both education and economic activity—sectors that have already suffered massive setbacks due to the pandemic. This should serve as a wake-up call for the authorities that must increase testing

and strive to make the immunization drive a success.

Initially, doctors and paramedical staff were hesitant to be vaccinated but with time people were aware of the facts of no side effects reported by the vaccinated health care workers. Aside from the resumption of normal life and commercial activities, one of the key positive consequences of the vaccine is that it will lower hospitalizations [6].

In Pakistan, not a single vaccine of any kind is being produced despite over 700 pharma firms [7]. For making the vaccine roll-out successful, the authorities must put all their resources into making our policies right in terms of the pharmaceutical industry as there is a complete absence of the right incentives to produce vaccines in Pakistan [8]. The vaccine program warrants a proactive approach or Pakistan will be among those countries where the spectra of Covid-19 peaks rear its head regularly, spelling doom for the well-being of citizens as well as education and the economy.

There is a need for a further active public awareness campaign. The ministries of information and public health can play an essential role in addressing concerns about efficacy, side effects, the age factor, and other vulnerabilities. The authorities must realize that investment in this campaign is in the interest of stabilizing both education and the economy. The campaign may include the use of all types of social media, celebrity messages, virtual conferences and lectures for every age group, advertisement, etc. The concept should be to share information with the public in a convincing, transparent, and accessible manner so that citizens can make an informed decision about the Covid-19 vaccine. It has been repeatedly stressed by health experts that a successful vaccination program depends on high coverage, preparation, and an effective delivery strategy.

While there is hope on the horizon with the availability of the vaccine to those over 60 years, the management of the program is undoubtedly a challenge. The Ministry of National Health Service Regulations and Coordination, Government of Pakistan, make a strong system to ensure that every health care worker and elderly person especially prone for infection must get vaccinated. Officials must also think of how to utilize resources and demand for the vaccine to grow in urban centers. If hospitals are unable to deal with the volume of visitors, an alternative can be considered in mobile teams and door-to-door immunizations.

It is imperative that the government dedicate resources to the vaccination program and adopt a proactive approach to developing a communications strategy.

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