

The Magnetic Appeal of Vaccination

I have always enjoyed my role as an authoritative source of health-related information for my friends, although my mother, not a physician, still claims she knows more than I do. I pride myself on maintaining a data-driven, pragmatic approach that is tailored to what is best for patients. (Oddly, I probably pride myself still more on admitting to what I do not know, which shows my imperfections and, I hope, gives extra credence to the statements I make.) It is with this approach that I reviewed and analyzed the data regarding COVID-19 vaccinations, knowing full well that I would follow the advice of Dr Fauci and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to get vaccinated.

How is it, then, that people with far less knowledge or access to information are willing to discount the experts and opt not to be vaccinated? I do understand the concerns of people who are fearful of being vaccinated on the basis of the newness of the vaccines, and I hope that their fears will be assuaged with time (and with the anticipated move from Emergency Use Authorization to full FDA approval). I can also understand the fears of those who have autoimmune or other diseases and are concerned that vaccine-induced stimulation of the immune system might exacerbate their disease. For them, I hope we are collecting the outcomes of similar patient populations in order to generate the data that will provide reassurance.

Other concerns are harder for me to fathom. For example, as reported in the *Washington Post* on June 9th, a Cleveland-based physician who gave expert testimony at a hearing of the Ohio House of Representatives Health Committee stated that the vaccines magnetize people, causing metal objects such as keys, spoons, and forks to stick to their bodies. This physician also warned that the vaccines “interface” with 5G towers. (A surprising aspect of the story was that the *Washington Post* writer felt the need to state that this theory has been “roundly rejected by experts.”) At the end of the testimony, several legislators thanked the physician, and one praised her ideas as “enlightening.”

My question is, what role does this type of thinking play in people’s decisions to not be vaccinated? Do people really believe these stories? Are they waiting for more data? Or do they have a more general fear of medical science, and so are unwilling to follow expert recommendations?

Many people view themselves as too young and healthy ever to be seriously affected by COVID-19, even though young, otherwise healthy people are hospitalized with COVID-19. One anti-vaxxer who was interviewed at a protest emphasized the importance of sovereignty over one’s body and equated the rejection of vaccination with being pro-choice. (I am still trying to figure out the logic of the protest, as getting vaccinated is already a choice.) Perhaps a certain subset of Americans just feel a need to be contrarian.

The bill being debated by the Ohio House Health Committee, for which the expert testimony mentioned above was called, would prevent any employer—public or private—from requiring COVID-19 vaccinations. Many states have legislated or issued executive orders banning the use of vaccine passports. (I am not even going to cite a number, as it will be out of date by the time this letter is published.) Although individuals have the right to think whatever they want, and the government is obligated to protect the right of free will, we also have an obligation to protect members of our society from illness and death. COVID-19 is sufficiently infectious that a societal approach to combating it is required. But before we can even begin to debate the merits of mandates for COVID-19 vaccination, we need to remove misinformation and disinformation from the equation and base our discussions in science—or at least in reality.

While being vaccinated early on was important to me, postponing it might have given me a chance at winning baseball tickets, college scholarships, and lotteries worth millions of dollars. Although I believe that being vaccinated is an obligation to my patients and others in the community, I make no claim to altruism, as I did it for myself. Not only did I think it would be cool to be magnetized, I did not want to die of COVID-19.

Sincerely,



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