Talking to Your Team about COVID Vaccines

As more and more people become vaccinated, some of your team members may still feel some trepidation about getting the vaccine themselves. For hospital owners and managers who are desperate to be able to see clients in hospital again (and maybe unmask!), this can be a frustrating dilemma. However, how we approach the vaccination discussion can make a big difference in how team members respond.

[Forrester Research recently released a study](https://go.forrester.com/blogs/employers-are-a-trusted-source-of-information-about-coronavirus-but-face-competition-from-disinformation-campaigns/#:~:text=According%20to%20new%20data%20from,governments%20and%20social%20media%20sites.) that showed that employers are considered the third most trusted source of information about COVID vaccines. This puts you, the practice leadership, ahead of Facebook, Twitter, and even government agencies. In fact, 85% of those surveyed stated they would trust their employer at least somewhat on the subject, and 69% stated they would use the information their employers provided in their decision-making process. This puts you in the same trust category as TV news and newspapers (and their associated websites).

Unfortunately, this is a very charged topic, both personally, emotionally, and politically. We also want to steer clear of any HIPPAA violations. So, how do we convince our team to get the vaccine without them putting up a wall or becoming belligerent? It turns out, the key is empathy and compassion.

First, put your judgement away and *listen* to the person. When people feel that you are trying to connect with them, they will be more likely to open up to you. Don’t accuse them of being an “anti-vaxxer,” or try to convince them straight at the beginning of the conversation. When they tell you their primary concern, reiterate it back to them. For instance, “so, you’re feeling unsure about the vaccine, but are also worried about getting COVID?”

Next, ask them to explain more. Everyone has different fears about the vaccine. Usually, though, it will revolve around some type of safety concern. This could include lack of testing, not understanding the side effects, prior experience, and knowing someone who had a reaction. Remember, fear is not a rational emotion, your brain identifies fear, then rationalizes it.

To neutralize fear, relate to the individual. For example, “I was concerned about that too, can I tell you what I learned when I was researching it?” or, “Can you believe I had the same thought when they first released the vaccine? But then I learned a few cool things, can I share some of that info with you?” Relating to the individual shows them that you aren’t judging them, and that they aren’t wrong for being afraid.

If they agree to hear more, then you can share some select, factual and non-personal information. In most cases, we recommend explaining that the vaccine started development after the SARS outbreak in 2003. Many people (who are over the age of 25 or so!) remember the SARS outbreak, so their brain can make a connection with that knowledge. This boosts their confidence in the information. Once they acknowledge this information, you can expand on how they test vaccine safety. For example, you could explain how researchers look at both vaccinated and unvaccinated people, then look at who contracted the illness and what the associated side effects of the vaccines were. You can seal this explanation with an understanding confirmation, such as “Pretty cool, right?” or, “I think that kind of stuff can be fascinating, what do you think?”

Some people at some point in the conversation may state that they don’t need the vaccine, since they are healthy and are concerned about side effects. Again, this is a way to connect with the individual. For instance, “I had that thought as well, since I am a runner and never get sick. But it turns out that I would have a better chance of being struck by lightning than having a bad reaction to the vaccine!” or, “You know, my husband thought the same thing, he never gets sick and really struggles the rare times he does. But it turns out the risk of getting side effects is so low that is really isn’t a concern.”

You might notice that at no point did we recommend they get the vaccine. They need to make that choice themselves (unless you are mandating it). We recommend these conversations be had one on one, as people don’t like to be honest about these kinds of concerns when other people are around.

Here are a few other ways you could help your team be more proactive about getting the COVID vaccine:

* Offer a PTO day to get the vaccine, and one to two days after in case of side effects. It is a small investment that can help you re-open your practice sooner.
* Incentivize it! Some hospitals are offering gift cards to their teams, others are offering small bonuses. Some hospitals are telling their teams that once everyone is vaccinated, team members can unmask. Still others are hosting lunch for their teams when everyone gets vaccinated. The sky is the limit!
* Talk about what “normal” will look like when people are vaccinated. There is so much uncertainty right now, a little glimpse into what will happen can help people visualize it.

Want to practice this conversation? Check out this [fun chatbot at the New York Times.](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/05/20/opinion/covid-19-vaccine-chatbot.html?campaign_id=190&emc=edit_ufn_20210520&instance_id=31243&nl=updates-from-the-newsroom&regi_id=94384457&segment_id=58597&te=1&user_id=e09d004d27a5a647fe84ae6c9f3613f6)

Questions? Just ask your service delivery team member!