



COVID-19 Vaccine – Your Ethical Responsibility



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As nursing professionals, we are morally and professionally committed to care, and we are tired. It doesn't matter what role you are in as a nurse—bedside, administration, advanced practice, education, public health—every one of us feels it. The strain of battling the current shortages of nurses, clinical placements, and nurse faculty is compounded by the arrogance of those who care only for themselves and not their neighbors. Those who refuse to listen to science or facts and act against it. These are our patients and fellow humans who, by not getting vaccinated against COVID-19 (or even influenza, for that matter) or wearing masks in situations where the virus is likely to spread, contribute directly not only to illness, disability, and death in other people but also to the exhaustion of nurses and health care workers in *all* roles.

The most egregious of those who contribute to the evolving COVID strains are those of us who should know better: nurses. A quick Google search brings up multiple video examples of nurses speaking to reporters and espousing their views against getting the vaccine. I am sure Facebook and Twitter would yield similar results. What makes some of us think that our personal beliefs justify harming others?

The nursing code of ethics Provision 8 states: “The nurse collaborates with other health professionals and the public in promoting community, national, and international efforts to meet health needs.”^{1(pv)} Nurses have an ethical responsibility to the patient and the public to do everything in their power to improve health and to prevent illness, disability, and death. So, in my opinion, when nurses choose not to receive the COVID-19 vaccine or the influenza vaccine to protect their patients and the public, they violate the code of ethics that guides nursing practice.

For sure, there are personal health reasons where an individual nurse should not receive a specific vaccine. But when a nurse does not have a valid reason and chooses not to get a vaccine based on politics or other misinformation from sources that are not trustworthy or are not based in science, they violate the code of ethics. Even more damaging is when nurses who refuse to be vaccinated go public with their opinion and make false statements that reflect poorly on all nurses' intelligence, education, and moral character. Nursing as a profession has fought long and hard to be respected as a valued team member in health care and currently is held in high esteem by the public for the selfless work we have done in combating the pandemic. But a few loud voices can erode the trust and esteem we have collectively earned when these voices spout lies and promote fear.

Fear is what divides us. Fear is what causes us to act only in perceived self-interest. Nursing at all levels is no place for fear. We must remain courageous and call in or out those who stray from our code. We must demand no less of each other and our health care partners so that we can continue to our work to protect the health of the public and deserve their trust.

Reference

1. American Nurses Association. Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements 2015.

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