

# CHOICES AND CHOOSING

## Vaccinations tensions continue

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Vaccinations tensions continue! We are intrigued by reactions to the opportunity of vaccinations against COVID, particularly regarding the implications thereof for organisational health and harmony. There are different angles from which to try to better understand the tensions regarding COVID vaccines. We invite you here to explore the dynamics through an ethics lens.

When the choice to vaccinate against COVID comes up, we notice that colleagues' reactions seem to loosely group itself on a continuum of enthusiasm, matter-of-factness, hesitance, suspicion and refusal. There also seems to be vastly different ways of seeing the consequences of decisions that colleagues come to regarding their choices.

Let us start with the story as we understand it ...

*Not long ago, a new virus found footing in our globe. It started off in a faraway place, but quickly found its way into our communities, streets and homes. It continues to make some people feel a bit under the weather, others extremely sick, and cause death in alarming numbers. We have some simple protective measures: observing social distance, wearing masks and sanitizing our hands. Furthermore, scientists across the world have been working hard at finding a protective measure in the form of immunization. Scientific evidence, available at present, overwhelmingly indicates that the health benefit for individuals receiving vaccination outweighs the risk of not being vaccinated. Furthermore, experts advise that there is health risk to all if not enough people get vaccinated because of the protection achieved through collective immunity.*

Against this background **to be or not to be vaccinated is a matter of individual choice, but not only of individual interest**. Perhaps this is where the tension is felt: freedom of choice is a fundamental principle widely claimed, but what if our freedom of choice potentially significantly impacts your health? Furthermore, what if our freedom of choice potentially disadvantages our colleagues and clients because of refusing vaccination? This becomes murky territory.

Before we come to reflection prompts to navigate the murky territory, we share some thoughts that are upfront in our minds. Please add your own thoughts to these as you go along.

- In general, we think it is safe to say that most people want to be healthy and stay alive. Furthermore, the human species seems to be wired for survival and our ability to adapt to changing conditions to continue existing is evidenced through human history.
- In service of health and survival, gaining protection against illness through immunization, as a means of bettering chances to health and survival, is familiar practice. Yet, and with acknowledgement of statistically low adverse vaccinations side effects, COVID vaccines are not necessarily accepted in the same light. In fact, some hold the position that the path to survival and health is not to be vaccinated. As such, the general reasoning applied in choosing in favour of immunisation, as is evidenced when you stand in the clinic queue awaiting your baby's turn for vaccination against all sorts of illness, does not necessarily apply here.
- It then raises the question about what sources (if not scientific information) are relied upon to sway ones' vaccinations hesitance or refusal? We are talking here about colleagues who will, generally speaking, accept immunization and other health protection measures recommended by experts.

- Perhaps the sources we turn to for security and guidance, when we are in the midst of an unfamiliar threatening situation, are not in the first instance science. It points to what we fundamentally trust to hold us. It is noteworthy here that some of us then seem to find it difficult to be open to other viewpoints, creating a dynamic of division. One wonders if the mixed bag of 'side-effects' of social distancing, in its very nature, feeds into a lack of willingness to engage with what challenges our beliefs.

Building on these thoughts, we would like to suggest three reflection questions.

1. As said earlier 'to be or not to be vaccinated is a matter of individual choice, but not only of individual interest'. Considered from a point of view of consequences of our actions, do we sway towards the best interest of the group at cost of individual freedom of choice? What is the right thing to do?
2. And/or do we appeal to a sense of duty – towards clients, colleagues, our employers, ourselves, our families - to receive vaccination or not, but duty towards whom to what extent?
3. Or do we draw on reasons based on our character as human beings and social services practitioners– who we are and wish to be and thus justify our choices regarding receiving the COVID vaccinations or not, or at least not now?

We are keen to hear your thoughts, viewpoints, questions, insights and as a next step, hope to create a space for us to talk about how to work with the issue in our organisations.

Kind regards.

Johanna and Zelda

