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Arizona Thoracic Society Supports Mandatory Vaccination of Healthcare Workers

I watched much of the past year and a half of the COVID-19 pandemic in horror listening to the TV pundits and politicians argue against wearing masks, receiving vaccinations, and in general, undermining the safety and freedoms of all Americans. Nothing is done to regulate commentator or politician disinformation under the excuse that these pundits have the right of free speech as a fundamental liberty. Fundamental liberties are freedoms the population is entitled to fully enjoy without government intrusion. Nevertheless, the proper exercise of these liberties, taken in conjunction with the need for public order, national security, the preservation of moral values, as well as respect for the rights of one's fellowman—all of this necessarily entails that some restrictions be placed upon these liberties (1).

Only the freedom of thought, conscience and opinion are subject to no real restriction. Each and every person is free to think what he or she likes without fear of government interference so long as his or her opinions remain private. Freedom of expression is limited, most notably as it pertains to the violation of moral values and to the transmission of messages that incite hatred and violence (racism, discrimination, etc.) and protection of the greater public.

Some healthcare workers are arguing that they should not be required to take a COVID-19 vaccination because it violates

their fundamental rights. They are correct, they do not have to receive the vaccination, but at the same time their employer has an obligation to protect their patients/clients and other employees. That obligation exceeds the employee's right to vaccine refusal. In other words, those acting out by refusing vaccination should not be guaranteed employment in the interest of public safety.

Due to the recent COVID-19 surge and the availability of safe and effective vaccines, most health care organizations and societies advocate that all health care and long-term care employers require their workers to receive the COVID-19 vaccine (2). This is the logical fulfillment of the ethical commitment of all health care workers to put patients as well as residents of long-term care facilities first and take all steps necessary to ensure their health and well-being.

Because of highly contagious variants, including the Delta variant, and significant numbers of unvaccinated people, COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths are once again rising throughout the United States (3). Vaccination is the primary way to put the pandemic behind us and avoid the return of more stringent public health measures. Unfortunately, many health care and long-term care personnel remain unvaccinated. As we move towards full FDA approval of the currently available vaccines, all health care

workers should get vaccinated for their own health, and to protect their colleagues, families, residents of long-term care facilities and patients. This is especially necessary to protect those who are vulnerable, including unvaccinated children and the immunocompromised. Indeed, this is why many health care and long-term care organizations already require vaccinations for influenza, hepatitis B, and pertussis.

The American Thoracic Society and the Arizona Thoracic Society stand with the majority of other medical societies in *calling for all health care and long-term care employers to require their employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19* (2).

Recognizing that a small minority of workers cannot be vaccinated because of identified medical reasons and should be exempted from a mandate, should be assigned other duties as possible.

Existing COVID-19 vaccine mandates have proven effective (4,5). As the health care community leads the way in requiring vaccines for our employees, we hope all other employers across the country will follow our lead and implement effective policies to encourage vaccination. The health and safety of U.S. workers, families, communities, and the nation depends on it.

Richard A. Robbins, MD
Editor, SWJPC
on behalf of the Arizona Thoracic Society

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