

Dec. 21, 2020

To: Willow Brook Employees & Residents

Fr: Dr. John Weigand, MD, CMC, Central Ohio Geriatrics

When people hear the word “advent,” most think about the Christian season preceding Christmas, but advent is defined as “the arrival of a notable person, thing or event.” And this December, with the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines, the word could not be more relevant as we seek to celebrate Christmas in the midst of a pandemic.

This month, two important tools in the fight against the virus were approved by the federal government: the Pfizer and Moderna coronavirus vaccines. I can’t emphasize enough how critical these vaccines will be in ending the pandemic and saving countless lives through broad acceptance by healthcare workers, seniors and the general population.

Almost 30,000 individuals have received these vaccinations in the process of approval and very few (94 people) have gotten sick with COVID-19. The early evidence demonstrates that the vaccines are over 90% effective at preventing COVID-19 infections. In comparison, the influenza vaccine is generally 40%-60% effective.

The promise of these vaccines is immense if people agree to be immunized. Healthcare workers and first responders are the most at risk of getting COVID-19 because of their exposure to patients who are known to have COVID-19 as well as those patients with silent (asymptomatic) cases.

That’s why medical experts recommend that these workers receive the vaccines first; to protect themselves, their families and the patients for whom they are entrusted to care.

The fear of potential side effects and long-term risks of the vaccine have caused individuals to question whether it is safe. This is understandable, but the short-term risk of receiving the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine is very low. The vaccine is meant to stimulate the body’s natural immune response to fight the real COVID-19 virus if it is encountered.

The vaccine might result in 1-2 days of fatigue and a mild fever because of the natural boosting of the immune response. The vaccine will not give individuals COVID-19. In addition, the technology used to create this vaccine is not new; it has been used to create revolutionary medications for treating cancer and other medical conditions. Some people fear that the technology used to create the COVID vaccine is untested, but that is not the case at all.

Regarding side effects, it's important to recognize that the long-term risks of the vaccines are not known, but the long-term risks of actually getting COVID-19 are better understood. Getting COVID-19 can clearly result in long-term issues with not only the respiratory system (decreased breathing capacity), but the central nervous system (impaired memory and clarity), cardiovascular system (inflammation of the heart and blood vessels) and other normal body functions.

As a result when weighing the risk vs. benefit of getting COVID-19 or the vaccination, individuals might consider this line of thought. There is no benefit to getting the actual COVID-19 infection (except possible immunity, although that is uncertain because reinfection is possible).

As noted, the risk of short-and long-term effects of getting COVID-19 are concerning. The benefit of getting a COVID-19 vaccination to protect against the virus is very promising, and the risks of short and long term effects are most likely less significant than the risk of getting COVID-19.

With all this in mind, I have chosen to take the COVID-19 (Pfizer or Moderna) vaccine when it is offered to me as a medical professional. I will accept the vaccine to protect myself, my family and those patients I serve and for whom I care.

In the season of Advent, I consider this opportunity to receive the vaccine as a "gift", but also as something I can do to "give a gift" to my family and patients.