MANDATORY VACCINATION IS NOT THE SOLUTION

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More than a year ago, the world’s main objective was to contain the spread of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Now that vaccines are available, a new mission has been unlocked – to quickly distribute these vaccines worldwide. COVID vaccines are continuously produced and distributed across the globe. Despite that, the vaccination rate tends to stop increasing due to several reasons, including vaccine shortage, delivery delays, and inefficient distribution programs. Another factor that contributes to the problem is vaccine hesitancy, which could be addressed potentially by mandatory vaccination. Recently, there were proposals and suggestions which urge the government to require vaccination to protect the people from the harm of COVID.

Mandatory vaccination is a proposed solution to quickly attain herd immunity. In some articles, this proposal traces its roots on the argument that one’s freedom should not serve as a right to impose danger on others. In a Supreme Court case of Jacobson v. Massachusetts in 1905, the Supreme Court rejected the argument that the law mandating the vaccination against smallpox is an unconstitutional infringement of one’s liberty and right to control their health and body. The court declared that the government may require inoculations against communicable diseases to protect public health.

Moreover, millions of deaths have already been recorded worldwide and over 35,000 people have already died in the Philippines alone, highlighting that the government should have an urgency in achieving herd immunity. Although many have recognized the fact that not enough vaccines are available at present, there were suggestions that when vaccines become available for all, the government should immediately impose mandatory vaccination.
Lastly, without a general government mandate, people could have a mistaken sense that they have the right to refuse vaccination. There were multiple calls to the public reminding us of our duty to protect each other and to end the pandemic. There is indeed an urgency on speeding up the vaccination rate, and the aforementioned points are valid, even backed up with statistical data. However, some reports and studies contradict such claims and there are better solutions than mandatory vaccination.

First, the mentioned Supreme Court case upheld a local vaccine mandate, but it may not support compulsory vaccination on a nationwide scale, particularly when lesser measures were not tried yet. These include increasing transparency on the results of clinical trials and the distribution of vaccines in the country. In some areas, most people are not aware that vaccines are already available, or they are not knowledgeable about the process of acquiring vaccines.

In addition, an EU-funded project on epidemics and pandemics, which was done several years ago, found no evidence to support that imposing mandatory vaccination would automatically increase vaccine uptake.

Second, mandatory vaccination may be justified only for highly contagious and serious diseases, according to the Nuffield Council of Bioethics. Although contagious, COVID is not classified by Public Health England as a high-consequence infectious disease, because of its relatively low case fatality rate. In people aged over 80, the death rate is estimated at 7.8% but in children aged nine and under, it is at 0.0016% only.

Furthermore, vaccine supply is indeed limited at the moment. But by the time the vaccine supply is enough for all, the spread of the disease is likely to be controlled already to a degree that compulsory vaccination is not needed anymore.

Lastly, enforcement of community quarantines, social distancing, and wearing of masks were already done, yet are proven ineffective due to strong resistance. Therefore, vaccine
mandate may simply increase public mistrust and implementation problems, instead of speeding up the vaccination rate.

In 2011, a poliovirus endemic in India was eliminated, not through legislative efforts, but proper and effective communication with the communities and target high-need groups. They were informed and educated, their concerns were considered, and there was an investment in local delivery systems. The same efforts can be applied in the current situation.

While we want everyone to be vaccinated as quickly as possible, imposing a mandate may not be the optimal solution. We must consider our other options that have worked effectively in the past. The virus has spread too fast, so we should take action more carefully.

References:

