

GUEST EDITORIAL

Many authors have suggested that one of the most important contributing factors to the enhanced survival of the human population over time has been the vaccination of children. You only have to think of polio and how vaccination spared generations of that disease. Naturally, though, improvements in environmental status, such as favourable living conditions and improved quality of life, have also played an important role in this.



Today, as we face a critical infectious disease – COVID-19 – in the form of a pandemic both globally, on a national scale and, in our case, a provincial scale, the significant contribution that vaccines make to controlling and preventing infection has become a topic uppermost in the minds of both healthcare professionals and the general public. So important is the COVID vaccine to human survival that many countries and corporations will not permit access if people cannot prove that they have been vaccinated. For this reason, ‘vaccine visas’ have become a commonplace passport of sorts that make it possible to cross national borders as much as business thresholds. Accordingly, which vaccine you have received has become much less of an issue than having had the vaccination itself. A COVID-19 vaccine now appears to be the only sure-fire way of preventing severe disease and death from the virus in citizens of all ages.

However, despite the undoubted successes of vaccination drives in saving lives, we cannot afford to become complacent or let down our guard: continued adherence to mask-wearing and social distancing is still required post-vaccination to ensure we are not infected by any of the strains of the virus. But these preventive measures have unfortunately now become the political target of many partisan lobby groups, including the ‘anti-vaxers’. As a result of misinformation, disinformation and fake news broadcasts, many adults – and now also children – continue to succumb unnecessarily to the disease.

The debate about whether to vaccinate or not to vaccinate has become even more heated of late as the indications for children are expanded. Recent polls in the United States, for instance, suggest that most parents prefer to adopt a ‘wait-and-see’ approach before vaccinating their children.

This means that extensive public education is required if the vaccine is to be widely used, especially among youngsters. At the heart of the problem, it would seem, is that it has been such a long time since vaccination was almost a way of life that today’s parents and families don’t appreciate the seriousness and efficacy of vaccination as a preventive or protective measure. Such scepticism is a luxury our citizens can ill afford amid a pandemic.

During the first wave of the pandemic, few children developed the disease and even fewer required hospitalisation. However, during the second and third waves children have become more commonly and more severely affected, to the extent that death among children is now more common.

Given the proven efficacy of the campaigns to vaccinate vast numbers of people, this evidence leads us to conclude that, with a vaccine available to prevent severe disease in both children and adults, it seems unethical that we should not vaccinate the entire population.

All-in-all, and appropriate to this stage in the development of COVID-19 and its vaccines, this issue is dominated by a collection of diverse views and topics related to vaccines just at a time when a new entrant has made its way onto the South African market.

Appropriately, then, this issue of the journal is dedicated to ‘vaccinology’. First, David Moore tells the story of how vaccines came into being. Then Cathy van Rooyen, Sylvia van den Berg et al discuss the currently available vaccines and how to treat any adverse events. Following this, and reminding us of the ethics surrounding the administering of the vaccine and ‘taking or not taking the jab’, Prof Charles Feldman provides readers with an ethical look at the COVID-19 vaccine.

Also in this issue, and bringing us back to the subject of allergy, Louise Murray and her co-authors provide us with a review of the diagnosis of allergy using the ISAC protocol.

Finally, Dr Spur makes his regular contribution.

Please go ahead and vaccinate yourself and your family when this is allowed.

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