

The Complicated Issue of Vaccination...

Keeping communications healthy and effective

Unfortunately, the issue of vaccination against COVID 19 has become a trigger point for intense emotions and discussion. We all have thoughts, beliefs and feelings about the vaccine and about vaccination in general; and we are all dealing with many long months of coping with the uncertainty, sadness, fear and frustration of the COVID pandemic.

More than ever, it is important for us to find ways to communicate about COVID vaccination with respect and openness reflecting the compassion and caring that are the foundation of our Kootenai health culture. How can we do this?

1. **Be aware of your own emotional response to the issue.** Consider the following... How we feel about a given issue or situation comes through our communication. The more unaware we are of our specific emotions about the situation, the more likely we are to unintentionally infuse our conversation with those feelings. When you are aware of what your thoughts, beliefs and emotions are, it is possible to temporarily suspend them when communicating with others. It does not mean your position is less valuable or important than that of the other; it just means you are able to provide an open, emotionally safe environment in which to gather or impart information. There is no way to completely set aside our biases, but being conscious of “what is yours” and “what is theirs” in a conversation allows for being open to hearing the position of the other person.
2. **Know what your intention is in beginning the conversation.** Are you engaging in the conversation in order to:
 - A. Be right or prove the other person wrong?
 - B. Persuade or change the other person’s mind?
 - C. Understand the other person’s position?

Just a hint: making statements that challenge or judge someone’s choice or trying to prove you are right – even if it is with sound information and evidence – are never effective ways to encourage change or persuade someone to rethink their position. An atmosphere of judgment or anger is a good way to create defensiveness or to start an argument, not a thoughtful conversation.

3. **Assume the other person believes what they are saying just as sincerely as you believe what you are saying.** When we believe we are right in our position, it can be difficult to understand how anyone can believe differently – or be “serious” in their belief. Just because their position does not make sense to you does not mean it does not make sense to the other person. Remember that *we all* see the world, communicate, react and assimilate information through the filter of our own life experience, knowledge, skills, etc.



4. **Some people are persuaded by science – and some are not.** We definitely need to provide scientifically-based information; but don't assume that just because you provide evidence of your position it will persuade the person you are talking with, or that they will automatically accept science as a dependable source.
5. **Have an attitude of curiosity.** Ask questions, ask for more information, seek to understand the position of the person you are talking with. If you can establish trust with that person in the conversation by letting them know you respect them and are truly interested in their perspective, they are far more likely to be open to your information and perspective.
6. **Don't take things personally.** Remember the section above about knowing your own position? It does not feel good when the person with whom you are having a discussion reacts with harshness or anger – no matter how compassionate you are or what your intention for the conversation. Just because they are reacting strongly to the conversation does not mean you have to accept it as a personal attack. Taking their words or actions personally is likely to motivate you to react with defensiveness.
7. **Be careful about statements and conversations that might be overheard by others.** Be aware of how your words could hurt or offend patients, visitors or coworkers. It can be very important and beneficial to process your feelings, reactions and stress regarding vaccination, COVID, and the pandemic in general. In fact, taking the time to process can help you be aware and non-reactive when potentially provocative situations arise. Just be sure you are doing that processing in a setting that is private and away from patients, coworkers or anyone else who could be hurt or offended by your words.

Come from the heart! Remember we are all here together to serve our patients and each other. It is important to hold on to the compassion and caring that inspired you to pursue a career in healthcare. This will not only help create more effective communication, but may, in unexpected ways, help generate some joy for you during these challenging times.

Provided by Kootenai Health Chaplain Services

The CDC has a helpful resource relative to talking with others about the vaccine entitled "How to Address COVID-19 Vaccine Misinformation." You can find that and other helpful information at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/health-departments/addressing-vaccine-misinformation.html>

If you would like support as you move through these stressful and challenging times, be aware of the following resources:

RISE Team – Peer support available 24/7 at 625-3300

Chaplain Services – 625-4792 or 208-661-4472

Your Manager or Director

Kootenai Health EAP – 800-272-7255 or guidanceresources.com/WebID: KootenaiEAP