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Subject: A Message from Pulmonologist and Critical Care Medical Director Dr. Jeff Wright
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Dear Colleagues:

Since March of 2020, we've faced unprecedented challenges here at work and at home as we've struggled through the COVID-19 pandemic. Our hospital has played a leading role in caring for the sickest of the sick in the Mid-South. Each one of you plays a vital role in the delivery of the complex care these patients need. You are the essential "front line" in this ongoing fight.

In March of 2020, when we saw our first COVID-19 patient, we didn't have any medications to treat or prevent COVID-19. Those were scary times. You faced your darkest fears and came to work, day after day. None of us knew what to expect, none of us knew what might happen if we got sick, we didn't know if we would take home a deadly virus to our young children, partners, or elderly parents. But we knew we had a job to do, and we did it. We've seen some terrific saves, and we've all seen sad losses. We came together and made things work, doing the best we could.

Our struggle against COVID-19 has changed. For one thing, the "delta" variant, a naturally mutated strain of the original virus, has emerged as the leading cause of COVID-19 here in Memphis. This variant spreads further and faster and it may in fact be more deadly than the original strain.

With many of our older patients being fully vaccinated, most of the hospitalized are the unvaccinated. And as of this date, all our patients on ventilators are unvaccinated. Let me say that again. All of our patients on ventilators are unvaccinated. Last week in the ICU at Baptist Memphis, we averaged one death a day. Sadly, the average age for those that died was just 36. You read that right, 36. The age range was 22 to 49.

Now, the disease is largely preventable. All of you have seen how we've managed to avoid getting sick here at work by wearing PPE. We can't lead our lives outside the hospital with a poorly fitting blue gown and foggy face shield on! But we can protect ourselves by getting vaccinated. Not only are we protecting ourselves with the vaccination, we also protect our loved ones, our friends, our coworkers, and our patients.

With literally billions of doses delivered worldwide, we know that these vaccines are very safe, with very few side effects, and even fewer serious adverse events afterward. Unfortunately, we've also seen widespread disinformation spread about the vaccine. I have to admit, I've heard some really wild misinformation about the vaccine. It's probably impossible to address

each one—that’s kind of like playing “Whac-A-Mole.” But there are some common fears that I think can be quickly addressed.

Here are some of the common ones I hear:

1. **It will reduce my fertility.**

Not true. This has been specifically examined in men and women and is just plain wrong.

2. **I can get COVID from the vaccine.**

Not true. There is no way possible for the vaccine to make you get COVID. It doesn’t rely on an attenuated live virus or virus culture to be made, so it can’t be infectious in any way. There’s also no mechanism for the virus to shed particles to others around you.

3. **I shouldn’t get the vaccine if I’m pregnant or planning on getting pregnant.**

Not true. The vaccine is encouraged and safe for pregnant women. In fact, some of the sickest COVID patients we’ve seen have been otherwise healthy pregnant or post-partum women.

4. **It’s too new.**

We’ve been developing mRNA vaccines (the technology used in the Pfizer and Moderna shots) for nearly 20 years, and SARS-COVID vaccine research started with the SARS-COVID-1 outbreak in 2002. American researchers had a vaccine target identified within hours of the genetic sequencing of the COVID-19 virus in very early 2020.

5. **It’s not FDA certified.**

True, it’s not yet. The normal FDA certification process routinely takes up to two years! However, the normal studies performed for a drug to be released, which are called Phase III clinical trials, were completed and analyzed before the vaccine was released under the FDA’s Emergency Use Authorization in late 2020. These were very large trials with literally tens of thousands of patients enrolled that showed the vaccines worked both well and safely. These results are published and have been subjected to a very precise and detailed safety review by international experts. We do expect the Pfizer vaccine to be fully approved within a matter of weeks, and the Moderna vaccine shortly thereafter.

If you have other fears or concerns about getting vaccinated, you should know that I’m happy to answer questions confidentially and respectfully. The only dumb question is one you regret not asking.

We have more ahead of us, but the best thing we can do together is get vaccinated. We do this for our families, each other, ourselves, and most importantly, our patients.

Thanks for all you do.

Jeff Wright, MD, PhD, FCCP
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