COVID-19 Vaccination: To Lead by Example or an Opportunity Lost

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Abstract
Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has created a global health emergency. Vaccine hesitancy and tremendous misinformation about the actual science are leaving the public with significant confusion. However, sound epidemiologic science is guiding us to a clear path toward mitigating this modern-day scourge. It is remarkable how putting an end to current COVID-19 outbreaks has such a simple solution—convincing the public to accept getting vaccinated. The dental research, dental education, and dental practice communities have a unique opportunity to act as trusted public exemplars as well as trusted interpreters of the science for the public.

Keywords: evidence-based dentistry/health care, social determinants, epidemiology, coronavirus, decision making, prevention

As leaders in our professional domains, including research, dental education, and practice, we must join other health professionals in mandating vaccination for all. We have an obligation that goes beyond scientific discovery, which includes combatting misinformation and being a resource for accurate health-related information to the public. As sophisticated generators and consumers of science, we must also accept a responsibility for the dissemination of science, including interpretation and translation of the scientific literature for those without our education, training, and knowledge. The ether is filled with incorrect information, and we have the ability and an obligation to help.

The emergence of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has created a global health emergency. However, sound epidemiologic science is guiding us to a clear path toward mitigating this modern-day scourge. It is remarkable how putting an end to current COVID-19 outbreaks has such a simple solution—convincing the public to accept getting vaccinated (Amit et al. 2021; Lopez Bernal et al. 2021). We have to start by setting an example. Commercial companies, including airlines, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Tyson Foods, and Walmart, to name a few, have announced vaccine mandates for all employees (Cutter 2021). The International Association Dental Research (IADR) represents the dental research community with the vision: “IADR values the pursuit of science to improve health and well-being for all people, to reduce health inequalities and inequities, and proactively takes actions and positions to improve health.” This is an opportunity for IADR, organized dentistry—through its national and local dental associations—and dental educational communities, including the American Dental Education Association, Association for Dental Education in Europe, and others, to serve as community role models, in support of science, by mandating vaccination for all. We are trusted health care researchers, educators, and providers, and we need to serve as examples of good community behavior with a vaccination mandate for all our employees.

As individuals who study, teach, and use microbiology, virology, and epidemiology in our professional pursuits, there are few individuals more capable of speaking with an active voice to promote vaccination as a safe and effective public health measure. It is critical that oral health professionals and oral health researchers take an active part in public health by promoting vaccination to all individuals, including those who do not access other primary health care providers. Our professions have been trusted by the public for decades to provide science-based advice and preventive therapies to improve oral and general health. There has never been a greater opportunity for the oral health community, researchers, educators, and practitioners alike to take a stand to promote science. A joint statement released September 1, 2021, from a number of US organizations called for “governmental executive, regulatory, and legislative entities to mandate” COVID-19 vaccination (APHA 2021). It is time for organizations such as IADR and other professional organizations to come together with a statement requiring vaccination for all within our research facilities, dental schools, and practices as a demonstration of our confidence in the science behind vaccination. If we believe in science, which we do, we must publicly step forward by supporting evidence-informed health policies that improve the health of the public, including mandatory vaccination, as well as other measures, such as indoor mask requirements where indicated by disease prevalence and occupancy density.

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If the oral health care community is to lead by example, we must support vaccination mandates for all employees in the health professions (with limited exceptions). We need to acknowledge the long-term global opportunity cost lost by allowing this pandemic to rage, lost opportunities to provide better health care to those in need due to lack of resources, and lost opportunities to speak up for and advance science.

Now is the time to lead by example.
This an opportunity we cannot afford to lose.

**Author Contributions**
M.S. Wolff, M. Glick, contributed to conception, design, data acquisition, and analysis, drafted and critically revised the manuscript. Both authors gave final approval and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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