COVID-19 Vaccination Through a Social Work Lens: Myths and Facts

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Agenda

• Opening Remarks
• Social Work Lens: Part 1
• COVID-19 101, Myths and Facts
• Social Work Lens: Part 2
• Question & Answer
• Closing Remarks

COVID-19: Context

• CV19 continues to spread, especially among certain populations/communities
• 776,300 deaths from CV19 in the United States as of today
• Over 175,000 children have lost a parent or primary caregiver to CV19; 65% are children of color
• Devastating economic, financial and social impacts
COVID-19: Context (cont’d)

- Long COVID impacts mental as well as physical health (*students for whom this is disabling may be eligible for educational accommodations*)
- Learning disruption and associated loss
- National emergency in children’s mental health, attributed to CV19: AAP, AACAP, CHA
- Spike in substance use disorders attributable to pandemic impacts
- Exacerbation of social isolation and loneliness among older adults

Underlying Conditions: Mental Health, SUDs, Disabilities

- Certain mental health conditions are associated with more severe COVID-19 illness; CDC has added as “underlying medical conditions”:
  - Mood disorders (including depression)
  - Schizophrenia
- Substance use disorders also increases risk of severe illness
- People with disabilities
Baseline Chronic Health Conditions Elevate Risk

The risk of severe COVID-19 increases with the number of underlying medical conditions.

Millions of Americans of all ages have multiple conditions, which can be further compounded by a mental health condition.
Vaccination Data (as of today)

• 59% of total population 12+ fully vaccinated
• 68% of total population 12+ at least one dose
• Vaccination recently approved for children ages 5 to 11

State variation:
• ME/CT: 70% fully vaccinated
• WV: 41% fully vaccinated

Vaccine Hesitancy

• Vaccines and vaccine boosters are highly safe and effective – but some people are “hesitant”
• World Health Organization definition (2015):

...(D)elay in acceptance or refusal of vaccination despite availability of vaccination services…It is influenced by factors such as complacency, convenience and confidence.
Vaccination Data (cont’d)

Lower rates in/among:
- Pregnant women
- Certain geographic areas (e.g., rural)
- Adolescents and young adults
- Incarcerated individuals
- People who are unhoused
- Historically under-served populations

Vaccine Hesitancy (cont’d)

Vaccine hesitancy can reflect, among other things:
- Perceptions about personal level of risk
- Negative prior experiences with health care providers/systems/treatments
- Religious and/or philosophical beliefs
- Socio-political views
- Perceptions of vaccine development process
- Beliefs about health and prevention
- Social/peer group norms, perceptions
- Communication/media environment
• Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) grant to NASW Foundation and the Health Behavior Research and Training Institute (HBRT) at The University of Texas at Austin Steve Hicks School of Social Work

• Opportunity for social workers: support clients in vaccine decision making using motivational interviewing and other models

• NASW-UT/Austin initiative includes:
  – Communications Campaign
  – Ambassadors
  – Training Webinars
  – App

**CDC’s Strategy to Reinforce Confidence in COVID-19 Vaccines**

- **Build Trust**
  - **Objective:** Share clear, complete, and accurate messages about COVID-19 vaccines and proactively address mis- and disinformation.

- **Empower Healthcare Personnel***
  - **Objective:** Promote confidence among healthcare personnel* in their decision to get vaccinated and to recommend vaccination to their patients.

- **Engage Communities & Individuals**
  - **Objective:** Engage communities in a sustainable, equitable and inclusive way—using two-way communication to listen, build trust, and increase collaboration.

*Personnel = All staff working in healthcare settings, including physicians, physician assistants/nurse practitioners, nurses, allied health professionals, pharmacists, social workers, support staff, and community health workers
The Behavioral and Social Drivers Framework

**Thinking and Feeling**
- Perceived disease risk
- Vaccine confidence (includes perceived benefits, safety, and trust)

**Social Processes**
- Social norms (includes support of family and religious leaders)
- Provider recommendation
- Gender equity

**Motivation**
- Intention to get recommended vaccines

**Practical Issues**
- Availability
- Affordability
- Ease of access
- Service quality
- Respect from provider

**Vaccination**
- Uptake of recommended vaccines

Source: The WHO BeSD working group. Based on Increasing Vaccination Model (Brewer et al., 2017)

Social Work Opportunity/Role

Social workers can play a crucial role in supporting client decision making about vaccination. We practice in a broad range of settings, are often trusted messengers in communities and bring a distinctive skill set reflecting:

- Person in the environment framework
- Patient/client-centered care approach
- Trauma-informed care models
- Cultural competence
- Public/population health and prevention expertise
- Disaster response expertise
- Commitment to health equity, access and social justice
NASW National Webinars

- **Webinar 1**: TODAY
- **Webinar 2**: (January 12, 1:00-3:00 PM ET): Using Motivational Interviewing (MI) and Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) to Support Clients in Vaccine Decision Making
- **Webinar 3**: (February 23, 1:00-2:30 PM ET): Supporting Special Populations
  - Vulnerable and marginalized groups
  - Rural communities
  - Children/families
  - Others

Application of a Social Work Lens

Social workers play an important role in supporting clients with differential needs due to:

- Prioritization of rapport building and patient autonomy (i.e. informed consent)
- Adherence to guiding frameworks:
  - Social Determinants of Health
  - Trauma-informed care
  - Harm reduction
- Ability to spend additional time with patients
Case Example

Ms. K is a 54 year old female who lives alone. Her husband of 20+ years passed away 3 years prior due to cancer. Ms. K’s primary source of income is disability which she obtained due to long-standing mental health concerns. Ms. K has an established relationship with her PCP of 8 years and has intermittently been connected with behavioral health services. She experiences extreme anxiety when needing to leave the house. Ms. K is routinely in the position of being a care provider for her close friends – many of whom also have chronic health issues.

- Past Medical History: Chronic Pain; COPD (Stage III); Breast CA s/p lumpectomy;
- Past Behavioral Health History: Complex PTSD; Complex Grief; Panic D/o w/ agoraphobia; nicotine dependence

Ms. K is debating whether or not to pursue vaccination

Application of a Social Work Lens

Strategies for Supporting Ms. K

Assess
Validate Fears & Concerns
Educate
Address Mis-information
Leverage “Trusted Messengers”
Follow-up

Provide information on how to access the COVID-19 vaccine and what to expect during vaccination. Proactively identify ways to remove barriers to care to enhance motivation and reduce anxiety.
Application of a Social Work Lens

When supporting Ms. K, attention was paid to:

• Perception of vaccine benefits and risks
• Behavioral health considerations
• Differential learning needs
• The social environment of care
• Consistency, pace, and nature of messaging
• Interprofessional collaboration