

# President's Column

## MARCH 2021

by Adj Assoc Prof Tan Tze Lee, President, 27<sup>th</sup> Council, College of Family Physicians Singapore

**A**s 2020 wound to a close, PM Lee announced on 14 Dec that Singapore would be getting its first batch of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine. The medical community was ecstatic on hearing this good news, the long awaited and much needed morale booster for us all. Many waited with bated breath as we anticipated our turn to get our jabs. We dutifully submitted our names for vaccination, made appointments to take our vaccinations at the various designated hospitals, polyclinics, GP clinics and vaccination centres.

For some, there was uncertainty about eligibility for the vaccine because of a past history of allergies. This caused them much distress and disappointment as there were significant numbers with such issues who still wanted to be considered for the vaccination. MOH was informed about this situation, and we are grateful for their expeditious response. Together with AIC, another portal for registration for such individuals was set up to reassess their risk status and eligibility. This is a godsend to many of us who see the value of timely and early vaccination in our ongoing fight against Covid-19.

The first person to receive the vaccine was NCID senior staff nurse Sarah Lim on 30 Dec 2020. By the end of January 2021, some 155,000\* have been vaccinated, with a reported anaphylaxis rate of 2.6% (all of whom have recovered).

Vaccine hesitancy remains a real concern. Despite the government making the vaccine free and voluntary for all Singaporeans and long-term residents, there remain a significant number (10.9%) in a recent online survey who disagreed or strongly disagreed to get themselves vaccinated.<sup>1</sup> "Doc, Should I take the vaccine?" This question has been asked of me and many other doctors these couple of months.

There have been all sorts of concerns on the ground:

1. concerns about potential allergies, anaphylaxis and other side effects,
2. concerns about whether vaccine safety had been compromised as the testing and approval process was so rapid,
3. concerns about the various conspiracy theories which clog up the internet.

The benefits would appear to far outweigh the risks, as can be seen by the great reduction of infections in countries with comprehensive vaccination programmes.<sup>2</sup> Have I had my vaccination? Indeed I have as well as my clinic colleagues. We have all had our 2<sup>nd</sup> doses and are none the worse for it! As we gain more experience with Covid-19 vaccination, and with the recent approval by HSA of the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine, let's hope for and work towards better acceptance and improved vaccination rates.

SASH. Swab and Send Home. This has been one of the cornerstones of our fight against the pandemic. By having clinics offering SASH conveniently located in the community, it has greatly increased the uptake of SASH, as well as improved detection of positive cases. PHPC clinics across the island have been part of MOH's massive effort to bring this service nationwide. In the early days, there was great fear and reluctance to undergo SASH. However when the service is offered by GPs that the patients are familiar and comfortable with, the acceptance rate can be very much better, in some cases almost 100%! Since offering SASH to our patients, we have likewise found that the acceptance to be very high especially as it is being performed inhouse. I would encourage those of us who have yet to offer SASH to consider offering this service. And well done to all those who are already on the scheme!

As we continue down this road to recovery, many of us will face different challenges in our various roles. We need to remind ourselves to take some time out for self-care, and also find ways to support each other in this time of need. Every little act of kindness and concern will go a long way to make tomorrow a better day.

*No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.*

**Aesop**

\*At time of print, the latest figures for Covid-19 vaccination on 8 March 2021 are:

Received 1<sup>st</sup> dose: 392,620  
Completed 2 doses: 218,694  
Total doses administered: 611,314

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/commentary/covid-19-coronavirus-conspiracy-misinformation-fake-news-13935382>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/vaccine-found-92-effective-in-israel-in-first-controlled-result-outside-trials/>