



Overcoming our Disagreements in order to Fulfill our Responsibilities: Easing Vaccine Tension in the Healthcare Setting



Communication and intervention strategies for healthcare managers in the context of tension and polarization around vaccination against COVID-19 for healthcare workers in the Fall of 2021 in Quebec

Vaccine Tension Context in the Healthcare Setting

- The pressure exerted on teams during the pandemic, combined with the lack of staff within the sector, can lead to chronic stress and generate frustration and irritability.
- Institutional choices about vaccination are pragmatic: decision-makers try to make the best choice possible with the available scientific knowledge. The social and institutional climate leaves little room for discussing the limits of the scientific knowledge that justifies these choices.
- For some people, the decision-making process to get vaccinated was rushed by the urgency of not losing their job, career and professional recognition, which caused an acute stress.
- This pressure has decreased since vaccination is no longer mandatory for current staff as long as they provide proof of negative testing three times a week. However, vaccine tension between the vaccinated and the unvaccinated remains.

Beware of Generalizations!

- The non-vaccinated are a heterogeneous group and are not all conspiracy theorists.
- Not being vaccinated is not just a matter of will or rational choice. Emotional, traumatic, family and social factors may also be at play.
- Being vaccinated does not necessarily mean not having doubts or fears about the vaccine.
- Some people may be in favour of vaccination, but against measures such as the vaccine passport or mandatory vaccination.

Vaccine Tension Impacts in the Workplace

On Unvaccinated Health Care Workers

- Possible loss of self-confidence
- Weakened confidence in one's colleagues and institution, and in government
- Silence for fear of stigmatization and fear of the economic consequences of one's position
- Feeling of alienation from colleagues and team
- Feeling of exclusion leading to withdrawal and isolation
- Possible irritability, aggressiveness and grievances

Between Colleagues and Within Teams

- Feeling of mutual incomprehension between vaccinated and unvaccinated people
- Feeling of powerlessness among certain vaccinated workers in relation to their non-vaccinated colleagues
- Sense of frustration or betrayal among workers who got vaccinated for work despite doubts or disagreement
- Feeling of concern or frustration among those who would like to see mandatory vaccination for health care workers
- Moralization of vaccination status leading to judgments and blaming on both sides
- Loss of mutual trust: denunciations, disputes about the application of rules
- Divisions undermining the work environment
- Increasing polarization that exacerbates negative affect
- Risk of open conflicts: disrespect, aggression

On Managers

- Delicate and demanding position of having had to manage the implementation of the government decree, staff shortages and absenteeism, while ensuring staff wellbeing and guaranteeing the quality of care for patients
- Increased pressure

On all Health Care Workers

- Potential disengagement from work and difficulty completing tasks
- Risk of burn-out
- Effects on relatives
- Absenteeism

On the Work and Care Provided

- Decrease in performance
- Impact on quality of care offered and on healthcare professional mission
- Possible impact on the experience of patients who feel these tensions



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Reducing Vaccine Tension

Managers

- While remaining very clear about the institutional position, send the message that sharing doubts and feelings about the situation is welcomed
- Emphasize the common mission of all staff members and the quality of the work
- Reinforce and recognize the commitment of all staff members regardless of their position
- Value the work and professionalism of non-vaccinated staff who could have been suspended
- Provide support and resources in times of need or burnout
- Use mediation when needed

Between Colleagues

- Avoid escalation in discussions about the health crisis and vaccines
- Use respectful language despite disagreements and irritation
- Share moments of relaxation and find topics of conversation other than vaccination and the health crisis
- Use humour to ease tension, but not sarcasm

With Patients and the Public

- Ensure that professionalism and benevolence are at the forefront of interactions with patients
- Ensure that tension between colleagues doesn't interfere with patient treatment, and that patients are not discriminated against on the basis of their immunization status

For More Information...

CoVivre Vaccine Hesitancy Guide (Practical Version)

Rousseau, C., Monnais, L., Tousignant, N., Mekki-Berrada, A., Mekki-Berrada, W., Gagneur, A., Gosselin, V., Santavicca, T., Ngov, C., Guenat, C., Schinazi, J. & Bolduc, E. (2021). **Understanding vaccine hesitancy and supporting vaccine decision-making: Practical guide for professionals in contact with the public in the context of COVID-19 in Quebec.** A CoVivre publication- ISBN 978-2-9820209-1-7
Link: https://sherpa-recherche.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/FR_Guide_CoVivre_Court_26-juillet-2021.pdf

CoVivre Vaccine Hesitancy Guide (Integral Version)

Rousseau, C., Monnais, L., Tousignant, N., Mekki-Berrada, A., Mekki-Berrada, W., Santavicca, T., Ngov, C., Guenat, C., & Bolduc, E. (2021). **Understanding vaccine hesitance among ethnocultural communities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic - Integral Version.** A CoVivre publication - ISBN 978-2-9820209-3-1
Link: https://sherpa-recherche.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/FR_Guide_CoVivre_Long_26-juillet-2021.pdf

Tool on how to interact with someone who makes conspiracy claims (French only)

Trépanier, M., Consortium interrégional. Savoirs, santé, services sociaux (2021). **Comment réagir face à une personne qui tient des propos conspirationnistes ? Stratégies compréhensives de communication.**
Link: https://sherpa-recherche.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Strate%CC%81gies-compre%CC%81hensives-de-communication_Consortium-InterS4.pdf

Tool for taking care of oneself and one's team in a pandemic context (Module 9, pages 111 - 122)

Cénat, J. M., McIntee, S. E., Noorishad, P.-G., Rousseau, C., Derivois, D., Birangui, J.-P., Bukaka, J. & Balayulu-Makila, O. (2020). **Psychological intervention guide: Intervening in the context of infectious disease outbreaks.** Ottawa: University of Ottawa, University of Kinshasa, McGill University, Université de Bourgogne Franche-Comté, University of Lubumbashi.
Link (pages 110 - 121): <https://sherpa-recherche.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/PsychologicalInterventionGuideV1.5.pdf>