

Where Faith and Public Health Meet

Category: Silver Linings

written by Olapeju Simoyan | March 29, 2021

Today I participated in a vaccination effort that was conducted at a church. Over the past few weeks, I have been reading about the faith community's varied responses to the pandemic. While disappointed with the responses of some religious leaders, I was encouraged by others.

Today's event brought me a sense of hope. It felt like a true meeting point of the faith and public health communities.

In the midst of all the hustle and bustle, I managed to ask some of the patients we saw about their everyday lives. A young woman told me she was working and schooling for a total of about seventy hours a week. A couple of people, who had initially indicated that they would be unavailable on the date specified for the second dose, modified their plans when they realized there was no alternate date for the second dose. One woman told me how she had been trying to get the vaccine for months. Another thought it would be unwise not to get the vaccine, even though she was nervous.

Even though I try to maintain an awareness of my assumptions, some of my interactions expanded my notions of human diversity. I was surprised to learn that an elderly black man spoke Spanish and not English. Thankfully, we had Spanish interpreters on the team. In an interaction with another gentleman, I reprimanded myself internally while asking where his name was from. (I get similar questions all the time, so felt I probably shouldn't ask, but my curiosity got the better of me). I was surprised when he responded, "Algeria."

I observed the racial and ethnic diversity of the patients who walked into the building to be vaccinated and thought to myself, *This is America*. People from different walks of life and different cultural backgrounds were coming to a house of worship to get vaccinated. Since the outreach was not limited to members of the church, there was very likely religious diversity, too. The faith and public health communities had united against the deadly virus. People were showing unity in diversity.

In the midst of a pandemic, we have learned so much. People can and will come together to fight a common enemy. Perhaps there is a silver lining after all.

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