

# Hope for Mastery Again

Category: The Vaccine

written by Pamela Adelstein | January 4, 2021

Breaking my vow that I would not check my work email during my desperately needed vacation, I peeked at my phone. Sometimes, anxiety about the unknown is worse than reality. Scanning my messages, one subject line made me pause: "Your COVID Vaccination Date." I clicked and read further. I was assigned a day, time, and place to receive the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine. Oddly, I felt nothing. No excitement, trepidation, relief, sense of history-in-the-making. Nothing.

Before my vaccination, scrolling through my Facebook feed, I dutifully clicked "Like" on the photos posted by my friends, colleagues, and acquaintances as they got vaccinated. I still felt blank as I heard tales of joy and relief with each vaccination.

On my own vaccination day, I, too, posted a photo on my Facebook page of myself receiving the vaccine. Those with whom I shared the news expressed relief, hope, and congratulations in return. Still, beyond a sore arm, I felt a surprising lack of anything.

But after we welcomed 2021, a new lightness in my chest and feelings about my COVID vaccination emerged. Throughout the pandemic, I have lived with discomfort and a sense that I lack mastery—a constant nagging that I could always do a bit better. Particularly regarding my work duties. My clinic, like the worldwide medical establishment, has been in reactive mode, improvising by trial and error. COVID testing, staffing concerns, PPE protocols, keeping up with routine patient care, telemedicine, and constant schedule changes have created chaos, questions, and discontent. Something or someone was always falling through the cracks. As a believer in the idealist culture of community health, and having been indoctrinated into the I-can-fix-it-all culture of medicine, I lived in a state of permanent dissatisfaction, lugging around a dread of falling short.

At home, I fared no better. Long work hours made me the nonprimary parent for the first time ever. One child worried about me and missed me, and my other child wanted little to do with me. Friends griped about my lack of availability. Alone time with my husband was unheard of.

The vaccine brings me hope for and anticipation of letting go of this sense of falling short. I look forward to being more present for patients, friends, family, and myself. My chest softens and my muscles relax as I envision a return of a semblance of mastery, security, and joy.

*Pamela Adelstein*

*Newton Center, Massachusetts*