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Dear Patients of the Sun Peaks Health Centre

**Re: Covid vaccine exemptions and other issues.**

It is with some dismay that I am even writing this letter, but the Health Centre is seeing a slowly increasing number of calls from patients requesting a letter exempting them from a Covid vaccine as well as other Covid vaccine related questions.

To clarify, the list of exemptions for a Covid vaccine are fairly standard within the Western world. They are:

1. Being age 11 or younger (that will likely go down with time)
2. Having received a vaccine for something else within two weeks (that means you can get the Covid vaccine after two weeks)
3. Having had a severe allergic reaction or anaphylactic reaction to one of the existing Covid vaccines or one of its constituents.

The two constituents that 'may' be responsible for Covid vaccine allergic reactions (which occur in 2-3 per 1 million cases – which is less than the risk of being hit by lightning) is one of the products found in a laxative known as PEG and the other is a preservative found in ice cream. Very rare occurrences indeed.

So, if a patient asks for a letter of exemption and does not fulfill one of the above criteria, physicians are being asked to write a medical legal letter which amounts to fraud. Fraud is a crime. A doctor can be charged, fined and potentially lose their license to practice medicine for fraud. I can't speak for other physicians, but I am not prepared to commit fraud so someone can avoid a vaccine.

The other issue that has come up is the frustration by patients that they are being 'mandated' by employers and governments to get a Covid vaccine. That may be something to eventually go through the courts to be decided. But here's a thought. When people get in a car, do they put on a seat belt, follow the speed limit and stop at red lights? Those are things that are 'mandated' (actually laws) that were brought in to decrease the likelihood of the driver, their family, their neighbors and community from dying in a motor vehicle accident. Covid vaccine mandates decrease the likelihood of you, your family, your neighbors and community from dying from Covid. Simple.

Another question that is frequently asked is whether the vaccines are safe? This is the so called 'vaccine hesitancy' issue – which is different than the full blown antivaxxer mentality. Some facts. The Covid vaccines are 94% effective in preventing severe Covid-19, hospitalizations and death. That is far better than most medications and treatments we give to patients. If you don't believe doctors are recommending the vaccine in good faith, perhaps don't ask doctors for antibiotics for pneumonia or other infections. Earlier this year, 86 cases of blood clots were reported in Europe, but that was out of 25 million vaccinations. In the United States 42 blood clots have been reported out of 13 million Johnson & Johnson vaccinations. With Moderna so far there have been 2 cases of clots in the USA. So, the risk of a blood clot, especially with AstraZeneca is .00004%, whereas the risk of a clot from the Birth Control pill is around 0.75% and from smoking it's around 0.18%. But the risk of a blood clot if you contract Covid is around 16.5%. Risk versus benefit.

Similarly, is the rare neurological disease called Guillain-Barre syndrome. Studies from the USA to date have shown 161 cases of this disease with 13 million Johnson-Johnson vaccines. That's 0.0002% incidence. The natural occurrence of Guillain-Barre syndrome is around 1-2 people for every 100,000 people.

Then we hear of the 'but mRNA vaccines are too new and can alter our DNA'. Actually, mRNA technology has been around since the nineteen-nineties. Most vaccines contain killed viruses or virus particles which allow our bodies to develop antibodies for protection. mRNA vaccines don't contain any virus at all. Instead, mRNA vaccines carry instructions of the spike protein (for information on spike protein you can check out Canada.ca website) which tell our cells how to actually make the spike protein. Since the spike protein is a 'foreign protein' unknown to our body, we develop antibodies to it which in turn confer protection to the actual Covid virus. As soon as the mRNA instructions are complete our cells destroy them. NO part of this vaccine goes into our cell nucleus where our DNA is, so no part of the vaccine interacts or alters our DNA. Elegant and safe.

I guess for completeness, although I shouldn't even have to address this, chloroquine and ivermectin DO NOT work against Covid. Plain and simple.

So where does that leave doctors and clinics to carry our everyday medical practice? Our clinic, like doctors worldwide, are going to continue to see and treat patients, regardless whether they are vaccinated or not. However, the Doctors of BC and the BC College of Physicians and Surgeons have come up with recommendations for 'in person' visits. Sun Peaks Health Centre will now start asking patients that need to be seen in person if they are double vaccinated. If they are, we will book them appointments throughout the day. Currently we are not able to accommodate all patients 'in clinic' as we clean the exam rooms after each patient. If patients are single or not vaccinated, we will book them, but it will be the last appointment of the day only (4:15pm). That ensures they are not in the building when potentially other patients such as children, are also in the clinic but it is primarily meant to protect the unvaccinated. It does entail full PPE for us which is more time consuming and burdensome. Finally, it allows us to do a more thorough clean afterwards.

To be clear, we are not ‘mandating’ vaccinations in order to see patients in person. This is not some form of ‘punishment’. We are simply trying to safeguard the unvaccinated, our staff and other patients.

So, despite my dismay, I continue to hope that everyone will get vaccinated. Yes, I believe the vaccines are safe (so far over 5.3 billion vaccines have been given with over 2 billion people worldwide being fully vaccinated – which regrettable is only 27.8% of the world’s population). Yes, we may need boosters. Yes, this pandemic is a long way from being over. Yes, I believe we will continue to see more variants that could well be more virulent and deadly than even the Delta variant. Yes, variants are more likely to occur if people are not vaccinated. Yes, I believe that the only way the world, not just Sun Peaks, will get through this without seeing tens of millions of people die (so far, it’s over 4.5 million deaths) is if we all get vaccinated, follow public health guidelines and yes, even follow mandates.

Stay safe and take care.

Sincerely,

Shane Barclay MD