

This Blithe upon us! Now, the vaccine...

By Debra Weeks, January 3, 2021

We are hopeful that 2021 will be a much better year than 2020! Ultimately, we have decisions to make and actions to take. First, there are myriads of questions, particularly about the vaccine... *Do we take it? When do we take it? Is it safe? Are 'they' using us as test samples?* There are valid arguments on every side.

Nonetheless, there is incontrovertible historical evidence that leads to why distrust exists as to whether or not to take the vaccine. No, I'm not talking about the rhetoric on social media that suggests *they* are tracking us through the vaccine and other conjecture... I'm referring to the historical structures innate within the very fiber on which America was built and the racial injustice/ racial divide with which it is associated. Imbalanced structural systems such as the economy, jobs and joblessness, disinvested neighborhoods, food deserts or food swamps, education and yes, healthcare, and I could go on... Why are essential worker jobs primarily held by Black & Brown people? Why have disinvested neighborhoods, primarily comprised of Black & Brown people, become food deserts or more accurately food swamps? Why is COVID-19 killing more Black & Brown people? And the needle continues to move downward, negatively impacting education and access to quality healthcare.

Is it race or racism that causes the structural divide? Any group living with systemic racism is subject to higher levels of social, psychological, emotional and physical stressors; thus, increasing chronic disease states... Leaving many in an extremely vulnerable position when a pandemic leaves hospitals with limited resources, predicating the decisions of *who has a better chance of living or dying*.

Being acutely aware of the lack of diversity inclusion in America, the fact that there's no National Strategy that could better protect us all, do we take the vaccine with limited information available to us? Well, a trusted friend and colleague who is a Physician responded to my question thusly: "All I know is this: We don't know about what the vaccine will do or the outcome. However, we do know that COVID-19 kills!" Those words continue to ring in my ears. Wow! Why did that statement resonate within me so strongly? Because, what she said is the fact! COVID-19 KILLS! Never a truer word spoken. Too many families can attest to this truth.

I often think about my 96 year old Mother. *How long can I protect her? How long can she essentially be hidden away and isolated? What kind of life is this for her last days? Which is fair? Which decision is conscionable? Do we make the choice to get her vaccinated or not?* There are mixed views, opinions and more questions among every family having these discussions. What do we do? For some, it's a matter of urgency, while for others, likely healthier, having no underlying disease factors, or not feeling the economic pinch, have the option to wait... Many cannot! Questions will remain, but the fact is COVID-19 has killed nearly 400,000 people in America to date. That number is higher than those killed in many wars.

Now, a new strain of COVID! More contagious than before... What does this ultimately mean? How do we get ahead of this? And there are political implications, we must exercise individual responsibility. Community leaders must establish a collective action that places racial action and accountability on every agenda to assure diversity inclusion. This is also a human issue that can only be resolved by each of us doing our part!

So, my friends, do we stand up and resist as long as we can and wait until they perfect this vaccine? Conduct more trials? Does this posture make us like those who have refused to wear their mask, subjecting the human race to more harm than good? Or, do we stand down and acquiesce? Not being sure of anything more than this -- COVID-19 has touched so many families and can eventually affect so many others!

The questions are many, the answers are few! Consequently, the fact is, it is a matter of life vs. death. How do you choose, for whatever time is left? The choice is yours!