

Correspondence

Mindfulness as key in easing COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy

ABSTRACT

The public's trust in the COVID-19 vaccination program is still a problem, especially in the Philippines. Many have suggested that the government and even healthcare workers should exhaust all their efforts to educate the public about the nature of the vaccines. However, rebuilding public trust is not only a governmental concern, but should also be taken as a personal responsibility. Thus, this paper argues that mindfulness through critical thinking is a necessary key in boosting the vaccination program.

Keywords COVID-19, mindfulness, public trust, vaccines

The COVID-19 has already caused troubles in almost all aspects of human life. It has affected all kinds of people regardless of race, gender and socio-economic standing. Humankind has had to bear with all of the misfortunes caused by this global pandemic until herd immunity is achieved. Months ago, most people thought that successfully developing a vaccine would simply solve all the problems. However, people's hesitancy to participate in vaccination programs is gradually presenting itself as another obstacle to ending this situation, especially in the Philippines.¹

In a recent correspondence, it was suggested that the government must take initiatives to rebuild public trust in the vaccination program in the Philippines.² Making doctors go door to door to educate people about the nature of the vaccine, promoting transparency in the government and role-modeling of public personalities were some of the proposed techniques to ease this 'hesitancy.'³ Apparently, these methods rely much on the effort of the government. However, in times like these, people should not only depend on the administration that has prioritized political ends over genuinely addressing the problem at hand. Aside from government measures, personal efforts must also be exerted. Thus, this correspondence proposes and challenges every individual to practice the virtue of mindfulness as a possible solution to the COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy predicament.

One of the few fortunate things that this pandemic has done for humanity is to unmask several social pathologies that were indiscernible prior to the phenomenon. The organized

efforts of various groups to spread wrong information are just one of these problems. In fact, even the Philippine government is to be held partly accountable for this misinformation because of its hired online troll armies.³ Misinformation continues to plague the online community despite these precarious times when receiving correct information is very essential. This surge of false information also badly affected the vaccination program of the government.⁴ Thus, mindfulness becomes more relevant. According to Filipino philosopher Jove Jim Aguas, mindfulness is keenly related to critical thinking and it should be practiced when validating varying data, ideas, opinions and information especially in this crisis.⁵ This should also be applied to people's discernment about the vaccines. Lack of understanding is the primary reason why people fear the vaccine.⁶ Assuming that the country orders vaccines worthy of injecting, the public's trust should come if people know for themselves the nature of the vaccines they are to receive. Rebuilding public trust is not only the responsibility of the government; rather, it is also everyone's responsibility to educate one's self and others. Education should not only be an individual pursuit, but also a communal one. Those who know have the duty to educate those who do not.

Lastly, respecting people's freedom to choose the vaccine they want should be another essential virtue.⁷ Unfortunately, in this crisis, the freedom to choose is not something individuals could get for free; rather, authentic freedom of choice is acquired only if people are well-aware of their choices.

Acknowledgment

No funding was received from this paper.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest in this paper.

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doi: [10.1093/pubmed/fdab050](https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdab050)