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Vaccinations in the United States

Vaccinations help the human body become immune to illnesses and diseases.

Vaccinations prevent many diseases like measles, mumps, and whooping cough. Issues begin to arise when parents choose not to vaccinate their children. While many chronic diseases are dangerous, strands of influenza (the flu) are just as dangerous to the population. Children and adults alike lack influenza vaccinations. Recently, vaccinations have become a very contentious topic, issued in schools, hospitals, and among family members. In the United States children are required to receive vaccinations to attend public schools, however flu vaccinations are not always required for hospital staff. In homes, it is often a debate regarding whether children should be vaccinated. Both sides of the argument have valid points, however, the most logical and ethical choice is to mandate vaccinations in United States, which will decrease and further inhibit widespread diseases.

Many hospitals in the United States require vaccinations for their employees to prevent the spread of diseases to patients and families. Patients already have weakened immune systems and are at an increased susceptibility to disease, so if employees do not get vaccinated there is an increased risk of spreading diseases to patients. While not all states require vaccinations for

employees, California created mandatory vaccinations after an outbreak of the measles in 2015 (Caplan, 2018). In January of 2015, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) had been alerted regarding a measles case. The case appeared in an unvaccinated child who was reportedly exposed to the measles in a Disney Land park. In the short time between December 28th to February 8th, 2015, 125 measles cases were reported, 110 of which were residents of California. Vaccination records among patients varied, some were not vaccinated at all and some only received certain strands of the vaccination. Of those that contracted the disease, 45% were unvaccinated. The point of origin for this outbreak is unknown (CDC, 2015). This outbreak could have been prevented if more people were vaccinated (PBS, 2015). While it is unreasonable to assume that the spread of diseases can be eliminated with vaccinations, they do help decrease the number of outbreaks. Likewise, those who get vaccinated help prevent the spread of disease to those that are not able to be vaccinated, especially infants who are more susceptible to diseases. As seen in the California outbreak, twelve infants were exposed to the disease.

As a result, not only are some employers requiring mandatory vaccinations, but vaccinations in children are becoming requirements in different areas. Because of this, parents were required to vaccinate their children regardless of outside inhibitors such as religious beliefs. Children are required to receive certain vaccinations to attend school. After this law went into effect, records of immunization increased substantially (Caplan, 2018). Not only did this apply for children attending grades K-12, but also for children attending day cares and nurseries. Implementing immunizations will decrease the amount of widespread diseases including influenza. Influenza vaccinations are not a requirement for attending school but encouraging flu vaccinations can help decrease influenza outbreaks, especially within school districts.

To reduce outbreaks among children in school settings, large-scale programs are being utilized to reduce infectious disease outbreaks and increase vaccination rates (Pierik, 2018). These programs have been effective in high class societies. The programs consist of vaccinating in a single community eliminating diseases. This reduces the contraction of diseases elsewhere in the society. This method has shown positive feedback as it is more effective to take on communities rather than on an individual basis (Pierek, 2018). While most parents find this effective and have placed their children in such programs, many are still refusing due to religious beliefs. Enrolling children in these programs would be most beneficial for the child and the family because it would help decrease the spread of disease in their own community. While religious beliefs of families are important, safety and well-being should also be a number one priority for families and their children. Not to say that religious beliefs should be set aside, but issues in unvaccinated children and families can escalate to massive outbreaks within a society or community. It is important to keep the well being of others in mind as well as the families when deciding upon vaccination.

Likewise, parents who are against vaccinations are contributing to the cause of these outbreaks. California doctors were even seen to have helped parents exempt their children from getting vaccinations outside of religious beliefs known as medical exemptions. After this was put into effect, the number of children starting kindergarten jumped tremendously (Caplan, 2018). When children are not vaccinated, they are coming to school opening the possibilities to many infectious diseases to other children as well as faculty. A problem that begins with just one individual then becomes a widespread issue throughout the entire school population, as well as within homes and around the community. Motivation and reasoning seen in anti-vaccination parents vary—some believe that children should have an all-natural lifestyle, while others

believe that being exposed to a disease like measles, allows for growth and development as well as a decrease in the likelihood of developing cancer or allergies later in life. Some simply believe vaccinations decrease effectiveness of the immune system (Pierek, 2018). Families and parents who are against vaccinations fail to recognize the importance of public safety, falsely emphasizing their right to choose individualism over the wellbeing of society. Families also lack education when it comes to vaccinations, many only hear horror stories, which are very rare, if they happen at all. When it comes to vaccinations, it is critical for parents to be educated on the importance of vaccinating their children as well as themselves.

Similarly, health care facilities suggest influenza vaccinations for health care providers. Some health facilities mandate health care workers get influenza vaccinations. Those that recommend or mandate have seen a decrease in nosocomial transmission. Studies show in the 2017-2018 flu season, vaccination rates in health care personnel was at 78.9% (CDC, 2019). Influenza vaccinations help fight against the most common strands of the flu for each flu season. When health care providers receive influenza vaccinations, it helps decrease the spread of disease from patient to employee and employee to patient, as well as through family members. Facilities that require mandatory vaccinations have seen an increase in sustainability of vaccinations, but also take into consideration religious beliefs. Factors that have contributed to the rise in mandatory vaccinations in health care providers are morbidity and mortality rates. Also, vaccinations effectively fight against influenza, especially in certain populations where pharmaceutical drugs are not effective at decreasing influenza rates. Vaccinations help healthcare providers become less susceptible to the virus (Matheny, 2013). Since facilities are beginning to push for vaccinations in health care workers, they provide educational information to help increase the likelihood of employees getting vaccinated. Once properly educated, employees are more likely

to take control of their vaccinations as well as their families. While this may seem like a small factor, each little step adds up and could possibly prevent a major outbreak.

Specifically, the importance of vaccinations in health care providers shows in adults who are of age 65 and older (CDC, 2018). At this age, adults are more susceptible to contracting influenza while resulting in greater health complications than those who are younger in age. Patients of 65 years and older make up most of the hospitalizations as well as for deaths in the United States (CDC, 2018). For hospitalization records, it is recorded that 70%-80% are those of 65 and older, while death records show that 50%-70%, are among those 65 and older (CDC, 2018). From personal experience of working in a nursing home, residents could contract something as simple as a cold and it would quickly escalate to a more complex illness. In their case, pneumonia or other respiratory infections can be extremely dangerous for their health. Adults are already more likely to contract an infectious disease and being around health care providers who do not protect themselves from getting influenza open risks for patients, especially the elderly. Factors that also increase chances for susceptibility are health care providers that come to work with influenza symptoms. Goals for future mandatory influenza vaccinations are primarily concerned with decreasing the rate of morbidity and mortality (Matheny, 2013). If health care providers were mandated in all facilities to receive influenza vaccinations, their chances of contracting as well as transmitting influenza would be greatly decreased. To reduce transmission, health care providers as well as patients and visitors should wear medical masks when having flu like symptoms.

To help increase vaccination rates and decrease the spread of influenza, the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center (OUHSC) provided influenza vaccinations to the campus for both students and employees at no cost. Physicians and students working within the hospital are required to have influenza vaccinations or can have a medical reason for why they can not be

vaccinated. Those who are not vaccinated must always wear a medical mask (Looper, 2017). Those who participated in receiving the vaccinations were part of study done by the University. The study conducted a survey for those who participated receiving answers regarding positive and negative outcomes of being vaccinated. Those that believed vaccinations were beneficial for patient care outweighed those who believed that it was not. Implementing similar programs would help decrease risk of infection in both health care providers and patients. Most importantly, patients would not be as susceptible to diseases if their care health care providers would take better precautions when it comes to their health as well as patient health. Patients go to hospitals to receive professional health care to cure their current illness, not contract a new one.

To ensure that health care facilities are requiring vaccinations, it is important that the facility is on top of vaccinating their employees, while the individuals are keeping up to date as well. Influenza vaccinations are beneficial for both patients and health care providers. They provide positive outcomes universally throughout health care facilities. When it comes to keeping track of vaccinations, it is both the individual's responsibility as well as the employer's (Cortes-Penfield, 2014). Patients within a health care facility should be receiving standard care. If the hospital is not suggesting or mandating influenza vaccinations in their health care providers, they are opening susceptibility chances for patients. They are not providing standard care. Standard care should come from both the individual as well as from the facility. The individual should take just as much responsibility for the transfer of infection. Health care providers know what precautionary measures they should have taken during influenza season to provide the best care and safety for their patients.

Conclusively, many who are against vaccinating themselves and their children, are not taking into consideration those around them. While individual's beliefs are important, it is most important to realize the danger of infectious diseases. An infection such as influenza may seem harmless to a healthy young individual, but the elderly is put at a higher risk of contracting the infection. Considering they generally have weaker immune systems; they may not have positive outcomes. It is important to take caution in the smaller infections such as influenza. If precautionary measures are taken in smaller infections, it could potentially lead to individuals taking precautions when it comes to more complex infections. Mainly, infections that decrease mortality rates in both the youth, middle aged, and elderly. Vaccinations need to be taken seriously regardless of the circumstances while it is merely a concern for the population, not just on an individual basis.

Furthermore, most diseases whether a case of the measles or influenza, are preventable. Vaccinations are readily available to those willing to seek professional health care. For those who are apprehensive when it comes to vaccinations, health care providers are required as well as able to provide information regarding every vaccination. They can also provide information on side effects along with how many cases of side effects they have treated. Some concerns may rise in those who do not have health insurance. In this case, there are programs for every state that help individuals become insured. Programs are also available to those who are not financially able to become insured or able to pay out of pocket (HHS, 2018). Resources are readily available in the United States to help reduce widespread diseases, but it is up to the individuals to take the correct precautionary measures not only for their own safety, but for those around them as well.

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