

Forum: *Advisory Panel (APQ)*

Issue: *The question of vaccine mandates*

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Introduction

In late December of 2019, the first known case of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19), was discovered in Wuhan, China. Within weeks, the virus was transmitted to other nations, and soon to other continents. As the infection began to spread rapidly, it was declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020, by the World Health Organization (WHO). The severe acute respiratory syndrome has no known origin deemed official by the WHO, which made tracing back the disease difficult. The struggle to produce a vaccine for the coronavirus began and when vaccines were approved for administration, the question of vaccine mandates rose.

It has been determined that the spread of the disease can be handled with the implementation of vaccine mandates. Therefore, governments have gradually adopted vaccine requirements. However, this was met with skeptics and legal challenges.

National obligations to ensure the health and wellbeing of citizens were of primary reasons to enact vaccine mandates, but at the same time, its implementation called for unwanted requirements that weren't the will of all citizens. Remarks and concerns of a restriction on expression and choice were some of the challenges vaccine mandates faced. The beliefs of people who are against vaccinations argued that the vaccines weren't safe and it violated the rights of people.

Vaccine mandates have often been questioned upon as the line in which ensuring the well-being of the general public and protecting the rights of individuals have always been debated. The effects of vaccines also vary accordingly to the virus and individual. Common side effects may be known and announced to the public, however, there may be unknown adverse side effects depending on the receiver of the vaccine. This leads to a decrease in the desire to receive vaccines and is one of the factors of vaccine hesitancy. At the same time, it calls for a much bigger backlash when vaccine mandates are imposed. When vaccine mandates should be implemented has also led to questions as the perimeter of a virus and its symptoms vary.

Definition of Key Terms

Vaccination

The treatment of a vaccine for the immune system to develop protection against disease. Could be provided by the government as part of the healthcare system or is only accessible through payment of the purchase.

Vaccine Hesitancy

The refusal or lack of desire to receive vaccinations due to beliefs, risks, and ideas. This term is commonly associated with “anti-vaxxers”. Vaccine hesitancy is the action that “anti-vaxxers” show.

Vaccine Mandates

Government requirement for vaccinations that gives businesses and schools the right to legally prevent one from their services or from entering.

Background Information

Vaccines and vaccinations

Vaccines offer immunity to diseases to some extent through the creation of antibodies when exposed to a disease. This is done through an injection of a needle or consumption of the vaccine. When the vaccine enters the body, the immune system identifies elements of the vaccine and builds antibodies. This allows for the immune system to recognize the disease at a faster rate, limiting the time and possibility of further infections.

Origin

Vaccines were first introduced as a practice to offer protection against smallpox. Its first methods were seen as controversial due to the vaccine material, however, Edward Jenner’s breakthrough of vaccines in 1796, revolutionized the practice of vaccination. Around a century later, Louis Pasteur’s vaccine for rabies also impacted the development of vaccines. Vaccine research and development was at its pinnacle in the middle of the 20th century. Common diseases such as polio to novelty diseases were researched upon in laboratories. As mutations occurred, innovative techniques were discovered along the process, causing the industry of vaccines to expand.

Vaccine mandates

Concept

The idea of vaccine mandates may seem reasonable to the general public, however, some people believe that the act isn't moral. Vaccine mandates require people to receive vaccinations as a precautionary measure that is labeled as beneficial and good for the wellbeing of all. However, the line between the freedom to decide whether or not to receive vaccines and being coerced into receiving vaccines is questioned. In some countries, vaccine mandates are issued as COVID-19 cases have increased or are done so as a precautionary measure. Before vaccine mandates, governments encouraged the public to receive vaccination through varying methods of persuasion. While some countries don't enforce vaccine mandates, they have also encouraged the public to receive a vaccination. Vaccine mandates were established to decrease the possibility of COVID-19 waves and a surge in COVID-19 cases. The concept behind vaccine mandates lies solely to protect the wellbeing of the general public through required vaccination.

Key Issues

Morality on Mandating Vaccines

Freedom in decision making

By mandating vaccines, leaves the public little to no choice than to receive vaccination as both public and private groups could legally dismiss a person upon entry or participation in an activity. This restriction has led to the idea of how it limits liberty in decision-making. People who do not wish to receive vaccinations due to varying reasons may also face the challenge of having to receive the vaccination. With governments and health organizations explaining that vaccine mandates are for the general well-being and the good of the people, there are voices of concerns about what exactly is deemed as "good" and who should be the judge of those.

The goal of achieving herd immunity

Concept

With one of the primary goals of vaccine mandates to be achieving herd immunity, there are factors to consider the effectiveness of vaccination in achieving herd immunity. Herd immunity can only be achieved when the majority of the population is vaccinated as it would decrease the number of hosts for viruses to maintain transmission. Transmission-blocking vaccines support the goal of achieving herd immunity as it lowers the spread of disease due to the lack of multiple hosts.

Issues

The distribution on vaccinations are uneven as manufactures from varying countries may produce and authorize their batch of vaccines. Age differences and health concerns also cause disparities in the distribution of vaccinations. Variants or mutations to viruses and bacterias will diminish herd immunity efforts as it influences the transmissibility of diseases. With changing variants and mutations, the process of developing vaccinations would create a gap in the immunity of past vaccinations for similar strains of viruses. Each year, influenza shots for varying diseases are issued and publicized to encourage vaccination among citizens to achieve annual herd immunity. However, once mutations appear, it takes up to months before a new batch of vaccine is developed.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United Nations (UN)

Statement on vaccines

Upon the establishment of the General Assemblies, subcommittees and organizations under the United Nations (UN) have been formed to collaborate on the development and research of vaccines. The promotion and accessibility of vaccines around the world has also been part of the UN's mission. Gatherings for world leaders and leading scientists, such as the Global Vaccine Summit, have also been formed to share research and information on vaccines. Oftentimes, official statements are made on the importance of vaccines and their ability to mitigate the spread of diseases. Emphasizing on the importance of the need for vaccines to be accessible around the world is even more so significant.

World Health Organization (WHO)

Statement on vaccines

The World Health Organization (WHO) being one of Us government agencies, also focuses on the significance of vaccine accessibility, safety, and development. Working together with other organs of the UN, WHO has gathered meetings to discuss the implications of vaccines and their side effects. With constant support on the development of vaccines, the WHO believes in the need for vaccinations to protect the general public.

Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Date	Description of event
December 31st, 2019	<p>First appearance of the COVID-19</p> <p>The World Health Organization (WHO), instituted in the People's Republic of China (PRC), received news of the cases from an unknown disease.</p>
January 9th, 2020	<p>Identifying the unknown disease</p> <p>WHO makes an official statement stating that the outbreak is from a new coronavirus</p>
April 13th, 2020	<p>Vaccine development begins</p> <p>WHO announces it's collaboration with scientists and manufacturers around the world in the making of a vaccine</p>
June 4, 2020	<p>Announcement from the Global Vaccine Summit</p> <p>The Summit emphasizes the importance of vaccines and their ability to alleviate COVID-19 situations</p>
31 December 2020	<p>WHO's statement on global access to vaccines</p> <p>A Disease Outbreak News report is made to highlight the need for low-income countries to have access to vaccines. Primarily, the need for every country has access to vaccines.</p>
15 January 2021	<p>Vaccine information is shared</p>

WHO along with experts held a meeting to discuss the implications of the vaccines and agreed to establish a platform under WHO to share information on vaccine safety.

Vaccine side effects are reviewed

7 April 2021

The Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety (GACVS) COVID-19 Subcommittee reviewed reports on COVID-19 vaccine side effects from healthcare workers. It was concluded that the benefits of the vaccines outweighed the potential risks, deeming the vaccines safe for use.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, including the right to development, 22 February 2021 (**A/HRC/46/L.25/Rev.1**)
- Call for Increased Global Cooperation to Facilitate COVID-19 Vaccine Access in Conflict Areas, 26 February 2021 (**S/RES/2565**)
- International cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19 (**A/RES/74/274**)

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The morality of vaccine mandates are often challenged as its implementation could result in the restraint of the citizen's freedom in decision making and varying beliefs of those who chose not to receive vaccines. The premise, however, is that despite the ongoing legal challenges that governments may face, the health of the general public is still the priority. Official statements, research papers, and findings have all been released in an attempt to ensure the public of the benefits of mandating vaccines. In countries where vaccine mandates aren't implemented, the issue of whether or not vaccine mandates are immoral has not been questioned.

Possible Solutions

The continuation of promoting and encouraging vaccination among citizens could be continued with the help of notable corporations and people of influence to increase the vaccination rate. Research findings on the importance of herd immunity and vaccination should be publicized to generate a sense of transparency and safeness to inform citizens on the benefits of vaccination. At the same time, mass media's portrayal of vaccination should also help highlight the importance of vaccination and its effects. Through the strategic use of mass media and collaboration among notable groups, the promotion and encouragement of vaccination can ensue without raising concerns on the morality of vaccine mandates.

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