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IPAF Statement on Misinformation on Covid-19 Vaccination by doctors in the social media.

IPA Foundation of SA supports the use of vaccination to contain the Covid-19 Pandemic. This is an Internationally accepted Public Health Response to a Pandemic that is not just a healthcare, moral and economic crisis, but also a Human crisis.

Vaccines are a safe and effective way to prevent disease and save lives.

When we get vaccinated, we are not just protecting ourselves, but also our families, communities, and the population as a whole.

However, what has emerged is that a few Healthcare Professionals have joined the Anti-vaccination movement. They are gone onto the social media, without supporting clinical data or scientific evidence, but solely based on their own beliefs, trying to dissuade the naïve person from taking a vaccine.

These messages are packaged to appear as science-based statements.

This is in contravention of the directives from Authoritive science-based organizations like WHO, FDA, CDC, and local statutory organizations like SAHPRA who are promoting the use of vaccines for Covid-19.

These individuals taking to the social media are entitled to their personal beliefs but should refrain from using the media to confuse the population who are at risk of infection by the contagion and hospitalization and even higher incidence of mortality.

Sad to say that the most vulnerable patients and those with co-morbidities may be influenced by these unsubstantiated anti-vaccination messages that are gone “viral”.

In our view, this is unethical, unacceptable, and even criminal.

If you are an anti-vaxxer, you are entitled to your views, but going onto social media to popularize your beliefs is unacceptable and immoral when the world is in crisis and the need for a vaccine is not a luxury.

Just in South Africa, 6600 General Practitioners have taken the vaccine voluntarily. Data from the Sisonke Trial shows that 490,000.00 Healthcare Practitioners have taken the JnJ Vaccine vaccine.

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These Healthcare Practitioners are in essence pro vaccine individuals. I do not believe that they all made the wrong choice to protect themselves so that they could render medical care to the Covid-19 infected patients.

Present information from USA, Canada, and UK is that about 60% of infections, new positive cases, and hospitalization are from the unvaccinated individuals.

The information globally with millions being vaccinated is that the benefits outweigh the minor risks.

We support the call by all other Professional groups to distance ourselves from these Anti-Vaccine Advocates.

We also support the National discussion that on “legal grounds purposeful intent to disseminate harmful, inaccurate and false Covid-19 vaccination information is an offense”. In terms of Section 27 (2) of the Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002, Regulation 11 (5) stipulates that, “Any person who publishes any statement, through any medium, including social media, with intention to deceive any other person about:

- a. Covid-19;
- b. Covid-19 infection of any person; or
- c. Any measure taken by the Government to address Covid-19;

Commits an offense and is liable on conviction to a fine or imprisonment for a period not exceeding six months, or both such fine and imprisonment.” (SAMA)

IPAF distances itself from the Anti-vaccine advocates and we encourage our constituents to make a decision to get a vaccine to be made knowing the facts, understanding the purpose of taking a vaccine, and weighing the benefits against the risks.

Let science guide your decisions and not the emotional packaged misinformation and “untruths”.

Prof MN Chetty

Chairman IPAF

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