

2021 - CHE Convention Address to Membership

By Sue Schuelke

Good morning, everyone! I hope that you have been staying well as we continue working through the COVID -19 pandemic, our primary focus on Infectious Disease this year.

Not a day goes by where the words “COVID-19” and “Vaccines” aren’t spoken. We are dealing with a 4th surge now in the US that continues to impact every aspect of people’s lives. School age children are being hospitalized more than earlier in the pandemic since they are more susceptible to the variants that have evolved. States such as Idaho and now Alaska have implemented “Crisis Standards of Care’ which essentially means a decision needs to be made on how care will be provide, when there are limited resources. The WEAVR program is the WI Registry to get volunteer healthcare professionals to assist in critical areas where there are limited resources in staff.

- Myths: vaccines will change DNA, government microchipping, “just a cold- I’ll get over it”. The use of bleach and most recently *Ivermectin* (horse/cattle de-wormer) used as a treatment. Some of these myths and conspiracy theories are coming from health care workers, not just a general member of the community. Mask wearing is being seen as “Theater” by some. Yet, there are now businesses in the country who want indoor mask mandates in fear of a repeat of early pandemic months and losing their businesses after rebounding from earlier months.
- Vaccines- focus on 4 groups of individuals:
 - 1) Boosters (Pfizer/Moderna) for ages 65+, 50-65 with underlying health conditions, healthcare workers, and residents in long term care facilities. J & J seeking emergency approval for their booster vaccine. You cannot interchange with the MRNA vaccines as they work by a different mechanism.
 - 2) Pregnant women or those trying to become pregnant. ICU and mortality rates are higher in pregnant women.
 - 3) Getting emergency approval for a safe/effective vaccine for children 5-12 y/o; under age 5 in clinical trials.

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4) Those individuals still unvaccinated or partially vaccinated.

We are now in the 2021-22 Seasonal Flu period: anticipate a bad year because last year was so mild, most likely due to protective strategies in place with COVID-19 (masks, social distancing, probably more hand washing/sanitizing than normal; home disinfection). The seasonal flu vaccine is currently available and can be given at the same time as the COVID-19 booster (Pfizer or Moderna). The seasonal flu vaccine contains a deadened virus while the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines are mRNA.

In the news last week, it was reported the drug company Merck is seeking emergency authorization for a pill that can be used to treat COVID-19.

- Variants: Delta still the variant of concern because of its infectiousness and level of severity in illness. CDC is being watchful of other variants called variants of interest-Lambda and Mu. MU is of concern in that it may be as infectious as Delta & may evade the current COVID 19 vaccines. Until we reach a higher level of vaccination, the COVID-19 virus will continue to have an opportunity to spread and mutate.

Articles written: several articles on Infectious Disease have been written and shared on the Partners of WHA website and a few things posted on the Partners Facebook page. I hope you have had an opportunity to read them and share the information with others. I'll continue to provide information on COVID-19 for as long as it is a major health concern this year and, unfortunately, into next. It is projected that we will not be experiencing what would be deemed as "Normal" again until next September. There will also be a series of Infectious Disease information posted in the upcoming months: Fall 2021 (Pneumonia/Meningitis); Winter 2022 (Shingles/Staph or MRSA); Spring 2022 (Hepatitis B, C/Salmonella) to help keep your interest and more importantly, to help educate Partners members on Infectious Diseases that are most likely to impact one's health along with preventive measures to help maintain optimal health.

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So, what can you do to help end the current health crisis? Follow the science and health recommendations from the CDC and/or DHS-get fully vaccinated, frequent hand sanitizing, and continue level of social distancing. Wear a mask when recommended or required. Check with your healthcare provider if you are unsure or “on the fence” about what to do because of your own situation, and get your information from reliable and truthful sources.

Reminder: October is National Breast Cancer Awareness month- screenings.