December 14, 2020

Open Letter to West Virginians from WV Healthcare Leaders: We Trust the COVID-19 Vaccine

West Virginia has experienced landmark days in the pandemic response this past week as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted Emergency Use Authorization for a COVID-19 vaccine. As we write this, thousands of COVID-19 vaccine doses are being loaded and shipped to states across our nation, including ours. As healthcare and public health leaders in the Mountain State, we are breathing sighs of relief because we are confident that this vaccine is safe, effective, and is our best hope for ending the current pandemic.

You might be wondering whether you should trust a COVID-19 vaccine. The COVID-19 vaccine development process has been the fastest we have seen to date because the entire medical, scientific, and public health communities building upon prior research technology mobilized like never before to end this pandemic. Clinical trials with tens of thousands of people showed that vaccination is highly effective in preventing COVID-19 and caused no serious adverse effects. We watched Thursday as the FDA's advisory committee livestreamed their discussion of the evidence leading to their decision to authorize its use. We tuned in again on Friday and Saturday as the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) met to review the data and provide recommendations for use of the vaccine. These expert committees agree that this vaccine has met rigorous, scientific standards of safety and quality, and should be made available for use by the public.

We want to be clear: We will get vaccinated as soon as it is our turn, and we will recommend it as soon as possible to our family members and patients based on guidance from the ACIP. We trust the process, and we think you should, too.

We have wept with the families we care for and serve, watching them struggle with severe illness and even death. Some have only had the opportunity to say final goodbyes on the phone. These images and memories will stay with us for our lifetimes. But today we are hopeful, because the COVID-19 vaccine can help end this pandemic, protect the health and wellbeing of our communities, and get our economy moving again.

We will each personally receive the COVID-19 vaccine as soon it becomes available to us. We will do this because getting vaccinated not only protects us, but the people around us—particularly those at risk of severe COVID-19 illness. When large numbers of people in a community are vaccinated, fewer people get sick, saving lives, ensuring that the healthcare system can continue to meet the needs of those it is intended to serve, and getting us back to normal lives as soon as possible.

Each of us must continue to do our part to prevent the spread of the virus. **Stopping a pandemic requires using all the public health tools we have available, and vaccination is likely our strongest tool yet.** As medical and public health experts, we take our duty to protect our patients and our communities very seriously. We will continue to do our part to end the spread of COVID-19 by getting vaccinated ourselves and encouraging our patients, friends, and neighbors to do the same when the vaccine is available to them.

Sincerely (listed alphabetically),

Joanna Bailey, MD
President, West Virginia Academy of Family Physicians

Anne Banfield, MD, FACOG
Young Physician-At-Large American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Director Women's Health Services, Davis Medical Center

Sven T. Berg, MD, MPH
Chief Executive Officer, Quality Insights

William Burns, MD
President, WV Chapter of the American College of Surgeons

Felix Cheung, MD
President, West Virginia Orthopaedic Society

Lisa M. Costello, MD, MPH, FAAP
President, West Virginia Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics

Scott Davis, PT, MS, EDD, OCS
President, West Virginia Physical Therapy Association

V.J. Davis, RS, MS
President, West Virginia Association of Local Health Departments

Laura Davisson, MD, MPH, FACP
Governor, American College of Physicians WV Chapter
Associate Professor of Medicine, WVU School of Medicine

Matthew Delph, MD
President, West Virginia State Society of Anesthesiologists

Ben Deuell, DO, FACEP
President, West Virginia College of Emergency Physicians

Shawn Eddy
President, West Virginia Health Care Association

Sherri P. Ferrell
CEO, WV Primary Care Association

Elie Gharib, MD, FACC
President, WV Chapter of the American College of Cardiology

Suzanne Gharib, MD
President, WV Rheumatology State Society

P. Bradley Hall, MD
President, West Virginia State Medical Association

Melissa Jensen, MSPA, PA-C
President, West Virginia Association of Physician Assistants

Robert Johnstone, MD, FASA
Director, American Society of Anesthesiologists
Anesthesiology Chairman, West Virginia University

Katie Kacmarik, PharmD
President, West Virginia Pharmacists Association
President, Ohio-Marshall County Pharmacists Association

Jim Kaufman
President and CEO, West Virginia Hospital Association

Sharon L. Lansdale, RPh, MS
President/CEO, Center for Rural Health Development, Inc.

PS Martin, MD, FACEP, FAEMS
President, National Association of Emergency Medical Services Physicians West Virginia Chapter

Kara Piechowski, PharmD, BCPS, BC-ADM, CTTS
President, West Virginia Society of Health System Pharmacists

Joe Prud'homme, MD, FAAOS
Christopher Cline Endowed Chair in Orthopaedic Surgery, Assistant Dean for Outreach,
Chief, Division of Hand and Upper Extremity Surgery, WVU School of Medicine

Matthew Rafa, PharmD
Vice President, West Virginia Pharmacists Association

Michael Robie, DO
President, West Virginia Osteopathic Medical Association

Angie Settle, DNP, APRN, BC, FNP
CEO/Executive Director, West Virginia Health Right, Inc.

Lauren W.M. Swager MD
Division Director, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
WVU Medicine, Department of Behavioral Medicine and Psychiatry

Jason Turner, PharmD
Owner/Pharmacist
Moundsville Pharmacy
New Martinsville Pharmacy
Pine Grove Pharmacy
Sistersville Pharmacy

Matt Walker
Executive Director, West Virginia Independent Pharmacy Association

Joyce Wilson, APRN, MSN, BSN, RN FNP-C
President, West Virginia Nurses Association