Dear Tulane Health System colleagues,

I am certain that all of us have heard the encouraging news about two COVID-19 vaccines being highly effective and safe. If all goes as planned, we will most likely see hospital workers offered the vaccine potentially as early as next month.

Being vaccinated won’t immediately end masking and PPE use, even though it will confer a higher degree of protection to our staff. The real benefit of the vaccine, though, will come not from preventing spread in the hospital. We have shown that properly used, PPE does that. The real gain of the vaccine is in preventing infections in the community – which unfortunately is where most healthcare workers are acquiring the disease now. In Kansas City, where the disease is surging, one of our sister hospitals has dozens of employees who can’t work due to COVID-19 acquired outside of the hospital, or because they are quarantined as a result of exposure. This is obviously compounding their ability to deal with the surge. Effective vaccines could largely prevent such a situation.

As for the pandemic itself, things won’t return to normal until the majority of the population has acquired immunity through infection or vaccination. Effective vaccines should drastically shorten that time and profoundly reduce all the mortality, morbidity, and lost productivity which would result from relying on infections to produce immunity.

If we rely on infections to do it, at least 200 million Americans will need to have been infected and recover. How long will that take and at what cost?

Let me be clear – the vaccine will be completely voluntary. No one will be required to take a COVID-19 vaccination. But I will take the vaccine not only for my own safety,
but also to hasten the end of the pandemic and all the damage the shutdowns are doing.

Sincerely,

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