

January 25, 2021.

Dear Editor

I would like to begin by thanking Ms. Selick for letting me know that I am now 33 000 persons closer to getting my COVID vaccine. Ms. Selick provides an interesting interpretation of various data and studies, which other writers have appropriately refuted. Recognizing that Ms. Selick presents a fixed belief that is held by a small percentage of the population, I fully realize that there are no facts, data or research that I could present that would be accepted by her, nor change her mind on what she chooses to believe. As with a belief in God – the true believer requires no evidence and the unbeliever would not trust even the evidence of their own eyes. It is to the third group that I would like to address this letter. To those who still are still unsure, let me present some data – facts if you choose to believe in science- lies if you do not.

In the months since this pandemic began there has been a significant increase in deaths, 20 -75 % more deaths around the world from all causes. Of these extra deaths, 50-70 % were directly attributed to COVID. The other 30 -50 % occurred because of delays in treatment from COVID anxiety, limited resources and overtaxed health care systems. So yes – not all deaths are from COVID, but because of the pandemic, significantly more people died last year. If you are grieving the loss of a parent, sibling or child – does it really matter if they died of COVID or indirectly because of it? My personal sympathies go out to all who have lost loved ones this year, especially the family of the 19-year-old young man who died in Ontario this week after acquiring COVID while working in a long-term care facility.

While Ms. Selick is correct – most people who have COVID do not die, surviving the initial COVID infection is often the beginning rather than end of their problems. In patients who were hospitalized with COVID, 30% were readmitted to hospital within 6 months of discharge and a further 12 % died, a far greater number than any respiratory infections. The COVID virus affects every organ system, so even patients with mild or asymptomatic infection, are developing new health problems such as heart disease, diabetes, kidney failure and breathing problems. A less reported but equally concerning effect of COVID is that almost 25 % of COVID survivors develop some neurologic or psychiatric problem which can include sleep disturbance, anxiety, depression and for a small number – psychosis and schizophrenia. Many non-hospitalized patients continue to have severe fatigue months after their initial infection, preventing them from returning to work or interfering with everyday activities.

The potential effects of COVID on unborn infants of COVID positive mothers are also concerning, especially as the full extent of these effects will not be known for years. Influenza and several other types of infection during pregnancy are associated with

increased risks of Autism, schizophrenia and other neurodevelopmental disorders. We would anticipate similar risks will also occur with COVID infection during pregnancy. These developmental risks are not increased in mothers who received a flu shot during pregnancy.

We have now identified 750 000 cases of COVID in Canada. Given our limitations on testing – there are likely many more who were not identified but are now suffering the lingering effects of infection. These COVID “survivors” are going to add to the challenges of our already over-taxed health system, increasing wait times and diluting resources even further. The new UK variant, which is now circulating in our communities is another game changer. Even if it is not more deadly, being 50 % more transmissible means that soon we may be seeing 25x more cases, 25x more deaths and 25x more survivors with long term health problems. It also means 25 times more people unable to resume their previous lives and employment.

Now consider the physical and mental burden COVID has placed on our healthcare workers. Many are themselves COVID survivors, all have been affected by the stress and anxiety of fighting both the pandemic and trying to ensure safe and effective health care for non-infected. Now, on top of this, they are having to fight the rising infodemic – the misinformation, conspiracy theories and COVID deniers. How many of our health care workers will want or be able to continue working once they see us through this pandemic?

We are now at a critical point in this pandemic. Variants which are now far easier to catch and potentially more deadly are circulating in our communities. This virus has proven its ability to adapt and change at lightning speed and in ways that means our own natural immune cannot recognize a return visit thereby allow people to be re-infected. These reinfections have often been more, rather than less, severe. Our immune systems cannot keep up on their own. Fortunately, we have help from a vaccine to prime the system and get it ready to respond. Many of the vaccines currently available and in clinical trials have been designed so that they can be rapidly readjusted when needed, helping us to keep ahead of the COVID virus. Are vaccines 100 % safe – of course not – everything in life comes with some degree of risk but they are probably 99 % safer than taking your chances with COVID. I for one, and all my family near and far, are anxiously awaiting our vaccinations.

If you have questions about God – you talk to a Priest, Rabbi or other expert in religion, if you have questions about the COVID vaccine or your health in general – please talk to your trusted health care provider.

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