



**Excerpts from the Transcript of an Interview Between CMO Dr. Kelly S. Ramsey and a RN in an OASAS
State-operated Addiction Treatment Center (ATC) on COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy, 8/26/21**

With respect to COVID-19 and when the vaccines first became available, what was your thought process regarding getting the vaccine?

Initially it [the development of the vaccines] seemed really fast, that they got them ready. But then I talked to one of the doctors I used to work with and she told me she knew people involved in the development of both vaccines [Pfizer and Moderna] and they assured her that it was done properly and she got vaccinated, so alleviated that fear. I don't like needles, I don't like getting poked, which I know that's a silly fear, but still, it was a vaccine. I saw some of my co-workers get the vaccine and get really sick afterwards and I was afraid to miss work. But then, I thought about how in nursing school you are taught actual v. potential and I could potentially get a reaction to the vaccine or I could actually get COVID-19 and potentially long-COVID-19 [long-haul COVID-19 symptoms], I could be intubated, I have asthma, so the chances are I wouldn't be doing too well [if I got COVID-19].

Do you think that the conversation you had with a physician you trusted, who reassured you about the development of the vaccines and that she had gotten the vaccine herself, made the difference for you?

No, it didn't. I thought more about it and when my boyfriend became eligible (because I was eligible before him, pretty much right away because of the populations that I work with), when he was finally eligible, then I thought, fine, we'll do this together and get vaccinated and whatever happens, happens. Which, looking back now, seems kind of stupid, because I could have been protecting him all along. But again, that was my mindset. It was partly procrastination to be honest too, because still afraid of that poke. And the doctor who told me that her friends had helped develop it, she bled big time and showed me a huge bruise. She was helpful in reassuring me that the vaccine was good, but I was still afraid of the poke.

So, when you talk to friends, family, patients, colleagues about vaccine hesitancy, what do you talk about with them? Do you talk about your own experience or how do you approach those conversations?

I haven't really had too many conversations because I work overnights now, so I don't get that chance to talk to them. They don't want to talk about that in the middle of the night. I am trying to think about when I've ever had those conversations. I think I just listened. What I have seen, particularly from Facebook, is all this shaming that people are doing, it's not going to make people get the vaccine. I think it's ridiculous. I think education is the main thing, give them the facts, not your feelings. They don't want your feelings. Some people might want them if they know you well, but really they want the facts. I think the population in general now is hesitant because they don't trust. We've been told, don't wear a mask, wear a mask, things have changed so much and if you're not in medicine, then I think you don't realize that medicine is constantly changing, as we learn additional things. For me, I was exposed to COVID-19, even wearing a mask, and the nurse I shared an office with, was good at wearing a mask all the time and washing her hands, but the office space was really small. She ended up getting COVID-19, but none of the nurses she worked with or the patients got COVID-19. So, to me, the mask worked. This was before the vaccines were available.

What was your getting the vaccine experience like, given the anticipation you had for it and your anxiety over getting the shot, what was the actual experience like?

The injection itself didn't hurt at all. I use my arm a lot throughout the day, so I didn't have arm pain.

With both of your injections, you didn't have any reactions at all?

The second one, we were both tired and we both had dreams that we crashed a car, really vivid dreams. I am obsessed with my one car and I dreamed that I crashed it, so that was horrible, but otherwise it was fine.

How did you feel afterwards, did you feel relieved? Protected? How did it change how you feel during COVID-19?

Initially, I felt protected, I couldn't wait for the two weeks to be done after my second vaccine, because then I will be protected. And the more I thought it about too, it's not just about protecting me, it's about protecting my clients. I've seen my clients get COVID-19 and putting them in isolation was not a fun thing to do, and their mental health was really bad. And it also made me realize when I worked some place else and they had the whole COVID-19 outbreak, I got tested, I kept getting tested, but my big fear was, am I the one? Am I asymptomatic and a carrier? And after getting the vaccine, especially initially, I just felt like I didn't need to worry about that. And I knew that nothing was 100%, but now with the Delta variant, I know that people who are vaccinated are getting it, but one of my co-workers just got COVID-19 and she's fully vaccinated and I honestly think she would have been hospitalized and intubated or dead from COVID-19 if she hadn't been vaccinated.

And that's exactly right, because of breakthrough cases, people are erroneously interpreting that as the vaccines aren't effective, but the vaccines are most effective at preventing serious illness, hospitalization, and death, just like you observed with your colleague. And do you plan to get a booster vaccine when you are eligible?

Yes, when it is offered, I will.

Anything else you think it would be important for people to know or consider when they are thinking about the vaccine?

If they are concerned about the poke and a little bit of side effects, it doesn't last long, like 24-48 hours v. getting COVID-19, which lasts much longer or possibly for years with the long COVID-19. My co-worker that just got over it, I can't imagine if she hadn't had vaccines. Also, yes, it's everybody's personal choice, but children under 12 years old still can't get be vaccinated and there are some people who can't get vaccinated due to an allergy to a component of the vaccine, it would just make it safer for them too.

The Delta variant is just the variant of the day and until most of the world gets vaccinated, we're going to continue to see new variants.

It's scary. I used to be a vet tech. I think about how puppies couldn't go out in public until they were fully vaccinated. So, you do that, so they can go out and fully enjoy their lives. And that's the goal, so we can be all out and about and enjoying our lives. I was already familiar with Pfizer because of the veterinary products they make. We don't have as much Parvovirus as we used to because of the vaccine. I went out to the islands a few years ago and they still had a lot of Parvovirus because they didn't have the vaccine available. Puppies were dying, adult dogs were dying, and that's not something we really see here because of the vaccines. We take it for granted and we don't fear it so much, that our puppies will get Parvovirus.

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I follow an animal rescue, that primarily rescues dogs from Tijuana and they rescue pregnant dogs that have Parvovirus and then the puppies are really sick. It's awful. And it's totally preventable.

Exactly. We don't have that here because most dogs are vaccinated. Although it's still out there. I just think that the more people can get vaccinated, the more we can get back to our lives quicker. Because I know, like you said, the Delta variant is just the flavor of the day. I'm afraid of what the next one will be.

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