

Older and Wiser: When it comes to vaccines, let's stick to the program

Where there are seniors who may be falling through the cracks, it is our job to assure them of the efficacy of the vaccine and to assist them getting it when we can.

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Seniors wait their turn at a vaccination clinic in North Vancouver in March 2021. Mike Wakefield, North Shore News files

Over the last few months, Canada has been rolling out the vaccination program for its citizens across the country. In British Columbia, at last count, 1,500,430 first doses had been administered, while there had been 88,475 second doses. With the first dose, this accounts for nearly a third of the total population. These numbers include myself, and some of my family members and friends.

Those of us who have been vaccinated have breathed a little bit easier knowing we have one layer of protection from the COVID-19 transmission. I must admit that I wanted to celebrate the passage of this milestone step with a big bash after such a long year of coping with COVID-19 effects on me, friends, and the community.

But it seems we still need to be vigilant if we want to beat this virus which has wreaked havoc in our communities. According to health information guidelines, we do not have full immunity until after

our second shot. We also may still be carriers of the disease, so we need to continue safe distancing and wearing masks when required. On the North Shore, the first and second waves of recipients of the vaccine were seniors aged 65 and up. Most recently, people 40 and older have been told they can register, largely due to the availability of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

Many of us who work on the North Shore with seniors have been concerned that for several reasons, older people may not be getting their vaccine. They may be intimidated by the vaccine itself, wondering if it is safe or reliable; they may have mobility issues and cannot find transportation to the two sites on the North Shore, one of which is a 15- to 20-minute walk from a bus stop, and parking is tricky (one 82-year-old I know walked six blocks to get her “jab”) and they may not have support or do not know where to find support to get to the vaccination site or how to register. Some seniors were worried about the lack of communication about the vaccination process in a language they could understand.

It’s crucial to understand, in my mind the importance of getting a vaccine. While it has been said the vaccine may not be magic bullet, we know it will slow the spread and potentially save lives. It can be argued that, as has been said about the flu shot, a vaccine protects not just yourself but others with whom you interact. So, if you do not get the COVID vaccine, as well as risking getting sick and possibly dying, you are also increasing the chances of others getting sick. The more people that are protected against a virus, the less the virus can spread.

Where there are seniors who may be falling through the cracks, it is our job to assure them of the efficacy of the vaccine and to assist them getting it when we can.

If you know of a senior who is demurring about getting a “jab,” try to reassure them by respecting their concerns and answer their questions calmly without hammering them. Try to address misinformation, again calmly and non-judgmentally. Also, be a role model and make sure you get out and get your vaccine soon. Organizations who participate in the seniors working group (funded by the West Vancouver Foundation) on the North Shore have been concerned about reducing barriers for seniors who may be having issues with getting their vaccine. They have been offering rides, phoning their members about the process, putting information in their newsletters, and creating and sending positive messages about the process. If you or a senior you know needs support, please try your local seniors centre or an organization serving seniors for support. Check out the 2021 Seniors Directory published by the North Shore News and North Shore Community Resources Society. They can be found at seniors’ centres and by calling 604-982-3302. As you have been hearing many times over the last year, we’re all in this together so let’s do our part.

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