

Transcript Details

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COVID-19 Reflections: How to Address Vaccine Messaging and Public Health Challenges

Announcer:

Welcome to *Clinician's Roundtable* on ReachMD. On this episode, Dr. Aslam Khan will share his reflections and takeaways from the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Khan is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Pediatric Infectious Diseases at Stanford University. Let's hear from him now.

Dr. Khan:

So I think one of the biggest problems during the pandemic was actually the messaging in our science communication and one of the early numbers that were coming out about the vaccination efficacy. It started showing numbers like 95 percent efficacy and really what that efficacy stood for and what it meant and I think the idea of what a vaccine is intended for and what immunity means infection versus disease. These little nuances were so important. And ultimately, I think that was where it started off a little bit shaky because there were some mixed messages or how things were perceived. And then downstream from that, that just led to either a little bit of mistrust or broken trust, and then that just amplified as things progressed going forward into different waves of different variants into the years of the pandemic.

I think for the pandemic, we saw that we were able to rapidly mobilize the arms of the government, the industry, and the various agencies that were able to put forward testing, vaccinations, and other therapeutics and really implement them in a faster time than we would ever have seen before, yet still do the due diligence of the right research and incorporating the necessary requirements to have our due diligence to make sure that these are safe.

And then I think the other big part is just understanding that as scientists and as physicians, we are advocates for some of these therapies, and in the age of social media where almost more than half of people receive all of their information on social media, communication needs to be on that platform. And unfortunately, that was not always the case. And there's actually some studies and a think tank that a lot of disinformation or misinformation was actually found from a few influencers, and so really just understanding that a social media platform is an arm to help empower people that these are the things about some of the therapeutics or why we wear masks or why we were asking people to do these various prevention measures when we had very limited information in the moment.

We do a lot of pediatric transplants and post-transplant care. A lot of it is infection prevention and hand hygiene, sometimes wearing masks in crowded settings if there's respiratory viruses circulating and things. And so when I talk to families about that, we say people are now privy to this information and that some people are more vulnerable than others. That doesn't mean that all people will change their actions, but I do think there's a component that the mass of the public does understand that some people have immunocompromising conditions or higher risk of getting severe disease from some of these more routine or standard viruses. So that's one level of information that's just been put out there.

In terms of hospital delivery testing and even home testing, I think people are asking more questions and thinking about like "Oh, is this COVID? Is this the flu? Can I help prevent this?" That's another piece that we do have available to us now that we didn't necessarily have as much awareness about previously. And I think the last thing is just there was a big investment in public health infrastructure. That's kind of stepped back, and it's not something that was sustainable, and that's something that we need to think about going forward.

Announcer:

That was Dr. Aslam Khan talking about what we've learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. To access this and other episodes in our

series, visit *Clinician's Roundtable* on ReachMD.com, where you can Be Part of the Knowledge. Thanks for listening!