



North Coast Physician

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Cover Photo

"WILLOW CREEK"
STEPHEN KAMELGARN, M.D.

The Editorial and Publications Committee encourages our member's comments for publication. Please submit electronically prior to the 15th of the month preceding publication. hncms@sbcglobal.net

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When I talk to those who are reluctant to get the influenza vaccine, I discuss two aspects of immunizations: personal health and public health.

Individually, immunizations reduce risk of severe illness or death. More broadly, being immunized adds to “herd immunity.” If enough people are immunized against a disease in a group (a city, a church congregation, a schoolroom, an airplane), the chances of the disease hopping from one person to the next is reduced. If one of those persons is a baby, someone under cancer treatment, or a frail elder, it can be lifesaving to have others in the “herd” immunized.

Individual health is wonderful. Societal health is also important. Vaccines are just one tool to improve the health of a community.

A child of mine once stepped off public transportation in a West Coast city with their partner to find a wall of people with megaphones screaming in rage about LGBTQ people. Rage and hate are bad for

societal health, creating fear, division and collective dis-ease.

A child of a friend texted from university classroom where students had been ordered to shelter in place and lock the door to a credible violent threat on campus. But that classroom had no lock, so the professor stood against the door to guard the class. The health of that student, all the people on campus, the city at large, the parents and loved ones and anyone who looked at media on their phones that day was adversely affected.

A young black student was murdered in a local college town, and still no one has been found responsible. Posters of his lovely face fill shop windows. Other posters of people of color dot the walls with the message “We Are Your Community,” to remind us that diversity is normal and positive. But our community has not proven to be a safe haven for diversity, and micro-aggressions have macro-consequences on societal health.

Another of my children faced constant reminders by the school community that they are not white and that they look different. Verbal and social media abuse persisted, affecting their health, the health of our family, and the health of the school community, which still cannot wrap its collective brain around the viral nature of micro-hate. Denial and soothing words do not stop such a disease as hate in its tracks. Which brings me back to herd immunity. Each person who has the ability to stand up for others even when it is uncomfortable serves the health of the community. Every person who chooses compassion and acceptance over rage and hate immunizes themselves against being a vector for spreading dis-ease. Each person who demands real action against injustice helps ensure the health and survival of our community.

And please, get your flu shot.

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