

Nursing Notes: Taking the Leap

After all the months of anticipation, political spin, and fear-mongering, receiving my Covid vaccine was notably uneventful. There *was* that snaking line of 40 cars outside the Grant County Health Department office that made me wonder if I'd make it back to my math class in time—I did, and it was a good rate problem to solve while I counted the flow of cars per minute—but that long line was reassuring: we were coming out in droves to receive the vaccine. Props to Margaret Diaz and our county's health department for building a well-oiled vaccine machine: I never left my car during the entire adventure, and when Jeff Fell gave me the old needle in the deltoid, well, I've had sweat-bee stings that hurt more. Piece o' cake.

A disclaimer that won't surprise you: As a nurse, I'm a product of the medical-industrial complex. While I've seen the shortcomings of modern medicine, I've seen its miracles too. Medicines, vaccines, and hi-tech medical tools are a daily part of life in the hospitals where I've worked, and I've seen lives, including my own, saved by human medical ingenuity. So I approach vaccines with fewer reservations than many. For this particular vaccine, I am not without some reservations regarding the speed with which it was developed. But after researching intensely this magic elixir I was about to inject into my body, I decided that its benefits outweighed its costs.

No vaccine—or, for that matter, any truly effective medicine—is without *some* risk, so we always have to weigh the costs against the benefits when subjecting ourselves to treatments. So far, there have been remarkably few adverse effects from any of the Covid-19 vaccines. The benefits—a population increasingly protected from the ravages of a disease that has ended the lives of nearly half a million people in the United States and left many others with long-term and possibly permanent physical damage—outweigh my personal risk as a guy getting rather too close to starting his seventh decade of life. More importantly, I consider the vaccine a way to “tamp down the curve” and keep myself from overburdening the local healthcare system. And best of all, it's a long leap forward in our quest to safely reopen schools.

In the end, it's every individual's decision whether to receive the vaccine or not. Recently, a good friend, himself possessed of a healthy dose of skepticism, asked me for my opinion about the vaccine. It's worth mentioning that both of us like hiking and packing in the backcountry, which leave us open to rattlesnake bites and other wilderness calamities befalling us far from emergency rooms—and yet we consider the benefits of hiking through the canyons of the Gila worth the risk of being far from front-country treatment. Later, I recalled that my friend had, in earlier days, bailed out of an airplane with a parachute on his back. Talk about courage and trust! My “courage” to receive the vaccines pales in comparison. But in each case—skydiving or receiving the Covid vax—my friend and I decided that benefits far exceeded risks, and we each leapt on our opportunity. My friend survived his skydive, of course—and a week out from my vaccine, I can assert, “So far, so good.”