Gallagher’s Pharmacy Practice

Key Takeaways on the COVID-19 Vaccine Update:
- The FDA JUST approved the emergency-use authorization first Covid-19 vaccine by the manufacturers Pfizer Inc. and German partner BioNTech SE.
- Another vaccine, made by Moderna, will likely be approved soon as well. Both vaccines are mRNA vaccines.
- The vaccine is reported to be 95% effective, where effectiveness in this case is defined as whether the vaccine can curb transmission of Covid-19 from individuals who are infected.
- The most common side effects were fatigue, muscle pain and joint pain.
- The next steps are all around distribution and vaccine campaigns:
  - The first batch will have enough doses to vaccinate 20 million people, prioritizing health-care workers and residents of long-term care facilities.
  - CVS and Walgreens have contracted with the CDC to administer Covid-19 vaccines.

Unknowns:
- How long will immunity last?
- Long term side effects of either vaccine
- How many people will take the vaccine once it becomes available?

Messaging Pearls for Vaccine Hesitancy:
- The vaccines are new and was made relatively quickly and therefore, understandably, there is some hesitancy around whether or not people will take the vaccine. Listed below are a few facts that can help inform clients:
  - The vaccines are “mRNA vaccine” which means it contains “messaging code” and tells our bodies to create the “covid spike protein.” When your cells release the “covid spike protein,” your immune system will form antibodies to the “covid spike protein” without getting you sick. This means, you cannot get the Coronavirus (Covid-19) from the vaccine.
- Many folks are concerned about the vaccine being new and previously untested.
  - mRNA technology is not entirely new. It has been studied and used in cancer as well as being studied for other Coronaviruses. It has not been widely used because those viruses never reached pandemic proportions.
- Many folks are concerned about the relative speed in which it was developed.
  - Because we are in a global pandemic, much of the “red tape” in the drug approval process was cut, and in contrast, significant technology and funding was added. Normally, there would be months of waiting in each phase of clinical trials, whereas this was addressed as the number 1 priority.
The number of people tested is on par, and in many cases better, than vaccines that are currently available.

- Others are concerned about side effects that haven’t been seen yet.
  - In general, most vaccines show symptoms in the first 6 weeks.
  - Severe symptoms are extremely rare, and have been shown in people who already have severe allergic reactions to start with.

- The risk of medical complications from getting the virus is far greater than the risk of taking the vaccine.


- In General coverage for vaccines are as follows:
  - Medicare - Medicare beneficiaries will have coverage for COVID-19 vaccines through Medicare Part B with no cost sharing (rather than the typical 20% coinsurance).
  - Private Health Insurance - employer-sponsored and individual health plans subject to the ACA’s preventive services standards **cover a coronavirus vaccine without cost sharing** 15 days after it is recommended by ACIP.
  - Medicaid - Under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, coverage of testing and treatment for COVID-19, including vaccines, is **required with no cost sharing**.
  - The vaccine initially will need to be covered on both the Medical and Pharmacy benefit to ensure access to multiple forms of distribution including but not limited to medical offices and pharmacies, however, this is subject to change.