


# Fear of COVID-19 infection among surgeons and hesitancy for vaccination. Who is the culprit to blame?

Michail Vailas <sup>1,\*</sup>, Maria Sotiropoulou<sup>2</sup>, Francesk Mulita<sup>1</sup> and Ioannis Maroulis<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Surgery, University of Patras, University Hospital of Patras, Patra, Greece

<sup>2</sup>Third Department of Surgery, Evangelismos General Hospital, Athens, Greece

\*Correspondence to: Department of Surgery, University of Patras, University Hospital of Patras, 26504, Patra, Greece (e-mail: mike\_vailas@yahoo.com)

Dear Editor

With regard to the article 'Surgeons' fear of getting infected by COVID-19: a global survey' by An and colleagues<sup>1</sup>, COVID-19 has become a pandemic that has spread worldwide, with a death toll already exceeding 1.5 million associated casualties. As stated in the aforementioned survey, surgeons' fear of becoming infected in their work environment has affected their everyday practice, posing a major psychological burden for healthcare professionals. Lockdowns have been implemented in order to flatten the infection curve, whereas the development of COVID-19 vaccines represents the 'holy grail' for global health organizations.

Interestingly enough, based on recent surveys, surgeons' fear does not imply willingness to be vaccinated, with a significant proportion of the surgical community facing the gigantic effort to set up global vaccination programmes with scepticism. In Greece, recent data indicate that only 40 per cent of healthcare professionals are willing to follow this path. Furthermore, based on our experience in the University Hospital of Patras, a strikingly lower percentage of surgical staff (22 per cent) will have the vaccine.

It is obvious that unwillingness of the medical community to comply with WHO recommendations for vaccination may have deleterious effects on how non-medical professionals and other community members face global vaccination campaigns. Physicians' reluctance to get vaccinated might prejudice other people who do not work in healthcare facilities against new vaccines. As a consequence, low vaccination rates may pose significant risks on the numbers of infected people and virus-associated deaths, with a possible increase in COVID cases;

this situation could be avoided if greater numbers of people were vaccinated.

Among surgical personnel who are non-compliant with recommended vaccinations, many respondents expressed concerns regarding the safety of a rapidly developed vaccine. Additionally, we all have witnessed the promotion of conspiracy ideas about harmful effects of new vaccines and governmental efforts to include the world's population in a huge experiment, not only on social media but also on television programmes and in newspapers. Therefore, it is imperative for the scientific community and surgeons worldwide to withstand this conspiracy pandemic that may have detrimental effects on public health. This highlights the need for early educational campaigns by global or country-specific health institutions, specifically targeting medical personnel. Parallel to their everyday efforts to treat virus-infected patients, doctors must convince people about the beneficial effects of vaccination. Physicians should lead the world in the fight against the pandemic and new vaccines seem to be the sole weapon.

*Disclosure.* The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Reference

1. An Y, Bellato V, Konishi T, Pellino G, Sensi B, Siragusa L et al. Surgeons' fear of getting infected by COVID-19: a global survey. *Br J Surg* 2020;**107**:e543–e544