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Vaccines, Vanity, and Victims

By Mike Tully

While most Americans hope for a Covid-19 vaccine, its effectiveness will be undermined by ignorance, fear, and scientific reality. President Trump declares a vaccine is imminent. He [told “Fox and Friends”](#) today that “We’re going to have a vaccine in a matter of weeks, it could be four weeks, it could be eight weeks ... we have a lot of great companies.”

This could be his most dangerous lie, which is saying something for a President whose lies fill the media firmament like stars in the sky. He celebrates quackery, insisting [people take hydroxychloroquine](#) and [musing aloud](#) whether those suffering from Covid-19 should inject disinfectants or receive 100-watt colonoscopies. But that’s political slapstick; his vaccine claim is more dangerous. It has a whiff of credibility and could get people killed if they rely on it and let their guard down.

Vaccine is not the goal; herd immunity is.

If someone breaks an ankle, their goal is not to wear a cast, but to heal. The cast facilitates healing, but is not an end unto itself. A vaccine is a means toward an end: herd immunity. That is why medical researchers don’t see vaccine distribution as their ultimate goal. The purpose is to accelerate the ultimate goal of herd immunity.

Covid-19 dines on lungs. Like any organism, its survival depends on available nourishment. The virus will not attack lungs that are immune because they are inedible. When enough lungs are inedible the virus basically starves and the threat dissipates. There are two ways to become immune: contracting and recovering from the virus, and taking an effective vaccine. The first scenario would likely kill millions of Americans before herd immunity is achieved, if ever. A vaccine confers herd immunity at a much lower cost.

[According to the Journal of the American Medical Association](#), “Typically, herd immunity is achieved when 70% to 90% of the population is immune through natural infection or vaccination.” “Herd immunity depends on the contagiousness of the disease,” [notes the Association of Professionals in Infection Control and Immunity](#). “Diseases that spread easily ... require a higher number of immune individuals in a community to reach herd immunity.” Covid-19 is a highly contagious disease.

Vaccines are not 100% effective.

Not every person who receives a vaccine will benefit. The [World Health Organization states](#), “no vaccine is 100% effective.” [According to a recent article](#) by Mark Terry in *BioSpace*, “the seasonal flu vaccines’ efficacy has ranged from 19% to 60%.” How effective must a potential Covid-19 vaccine be for the Food and Drug Administration to approve it? “First off, the agency indicated that it will require the vaccine be at least 50% more effective than a placebo in preventing COVID-19,” writes Terry. “That’s not likely to dazzle people, putting it about equivalent to a flu shot’s effectiveness in a good year.”

If a Covid-19 vaccine is 50% effective, the entire uninfected population would have to take it to even approach herd immunity. That won’t happen for the following reasons:

Skeptical public

Why should the public believe a President who said, [as recently as yesterday](#), "I don't think science knows?" "Anxieties over the process that could lead to the approval of a coronavirus vaccine are escalating," [writes Gregory Krieg on CNN](#), "as President Donald Trump, desperate to stamp an end date on the deadly pandemic nightmare, ratchets up pressure on top regulatory officials to deliver him a medical and political panacea ahead of the November election." "The Trump administration's meddling," he adds, "overt and by insinuation, also threatens to set off a vicious circle that could undermine public confidence in a vaccine."

Anti-vaxxers

Before Trump, there were the "anti-vaxxers," who oppose vaccination for philosophical, political, or spiritual reasons. "(O)pposition to vaccination has existed as long as vaccination itself," [notes a study](#) in [historyofvaccines.org](#). A California State Senator, also a physician, [experienced anti-vaxxer sentiment last year](#). "In 2019, I authored Senate Bill 276 to provide public health oversight over medical exemptions to vaccines," wrote Dr. Richard Pan. "The attacks became even more personal. Anti-vaccine extremists held signs and wore T-shirts with images of my bloodied face." He was physically assaulted twice. Then anti-vaxxers were joined by allies. "White supremacists joined anti-vaccine extremists demonstrating outside the governor's office, and my spouse and children received threats requiring additional security measures."

The King and His Cult

Many have observed that Trump would rather be king than president, [including Ruth Marcus](#) of *The Washington Post* and a reader of *The Fresno Bee*, [who wrote](#), "I no longer have any doubt – this man running for president would prefer to be crowned king."

Trump's cult regards him as a monarch. He [told journalist Bob Woodward in April](#) that Covid-19 "is a killer if it gets you. If you're the wrong person, you don't have a chance." He added, "It is the plague." Nonetheless, [the President held dangerous indoor rallies](#) in Henderson, Nevada and Phoenix, Arizona. He risked his followers' lives to bask in their adoration, and they placed themselves in danger to honor the man who lied about the danger in the first place. That's it how goes with kings and subjects; their lives are not equal. The last Hawaiian monarch, Queen Liliuokalani, wrote in her autobiography, *Hawaii's Story*, that her ancestor, Kamehameha IV, shot and killed his secretary. "No legal notice of the event was in any way taken," wrote the Queen, "no person would have been foolhardy enough to propose it." A king can shoot anybody and get away with it, in a Hawaiian palace or on Fifth Avenue.

Any hope a Covid-19 vaccine will return the nation to normalcy is false. The vaccine is unlikely to be more than 50% effective. The anti-vaxxers and skeptical public will suppress the number of vaccines administered. And the disease will spread like a prairie fire because Trump campaign events resemble re-enactments of [Jonestown](#). You can't drink Kool-Aid while wearing a mask.

Too bad there's no vaccine for stupid.