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Wydysh: Don't ignore COVID - but don't be paralyzed by it, either

As I write this column in the midst of the holiday season, first, I want to extend to all of you my hope for a very festive and healthy time for you and your family, and for great things in the New Year. Whether you are staying home or traveling far, celebrating with a few close loved ones or having a large holiday celebration, I hope you find peace and joy.

There is usually such a sense of optimism as we turn the page to the coming year. That, in many ways, I find missing this year. Indeed, the never-ending pandemic has many of us at wit's end. I know that we all had hoped that, by the close of 2021, COVID-19 would be much more behind us than is actually the case.

So, while I undoubtedly believe people should continue to take all the necessary precautions to keep themselves and their loved ones safe, starting with getting vaccinated or a

NIAGARA COUNTY LEGISLATURE



Becky Wydysh
Chairwoman

What do I mean by that? The fact is in March 2020, when much of the world shutdown, we were dealing with a new, unknown threat. Policy leaders had to make very quick decisions while the scientific community played catch up to learn about this threat. That is no longer the case. So, while we need our best and brightest minds in the scientific community focused on both treating and preventing COVID-19 - including new variants, thus avoiding these

booster shot, I believe our policy decisions from Albany and Washington need to start factoring in that COVID-19 is here to stay, just like many other communicable diseases. That means we learn to live our lives in this reality.

periodic surges in our hospitals - our public policy approach to the pandemic needs to evolve.

Take our schools, as an example. The fact is addressing the negative setback to our children, in both learning and social development, from closed schools and then remote learning is a monumental task. Current policies on quarantining students have continued the disruption, and the state is just now adopting a "test-to-stay" program that will keep most kids in school rather than sitting home for 10 days when they are fine.

Next, we have the business community. We lost many businesses during the time of closure, and many more just barely survived. These businesses employ people, add to our tax base and, simply put, are part of the fabric of our community. Their success is important to all of us, yet they continue to face significant challenges.

Then there are the large so-

cial issues. We saw increases in opioid and other substance abuse overdoses and deaths. People were not getting their routine health checks, including cancer screenings, which put their health at risk. The negative impact on nursing home residents who were isolated from family members caused unspeakable heartbreak for so many. These are very real problems that matter.

Fighting the unknown COVID-19 enemy made leaders take drastic steps regardless of the consequences. Now, going forward, those consequences need to be at the forefront of any policy decisions. Let the coming year be the one where we neither ignore the pandemic nor are paralyzed by it, but rather do what we can to keep ourselves safe and healthy, and acknowledge there is more to life than COVID-19.

NFMMC: Vaccine clinics continue to make huge impact

Center has handled more than 75,000 vaccinations to date

GUEST EDITORIAL BY NIAGARA FALLS MEMORIAL MEDICAL CENTER

Over the past year, Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center has been at the forefront of the effort to vaccinate our community against COVID-19. Leading this charge is Memorial's director of pharmacy services, Michelle Lewis, Pharm.D., MHA, BCACP.

Lewis, who was appointed this past spring as a member of the State Board for Pharmacy, has been with the Medical Center since 2005, providing exemplary care to both patients and the community. Along with registration staff and pharmacists, Lewis continues to educate and vaccinate the Niagara Region by hosting multiple community vaccination clinics each week.

This past week, one such clinic held at the Doris Jones Resource

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Center in Niagara Falls distributed 81 doses to both adults and children.

"There seems to be an increase in vaccine demand in the community, as people are seeing the negative effects on their families, friends and coworkers that has been brought on by the COVID-19 infection," Lewis said. "It is hitting too close to home for many people and, as they are getting their vaccines from us, have shared personal stories of loss and their drive to spread the

word throughout their communities.

"We will continue to serve these areas for the weeks and months to come, as we are scheduling clinics at Doris Jones and Abate Elementary each month in an effort to continue this service."

To date, Michelle and her team have distributed 13,360 COVID vaccinations. In addition, Memorial's team played a valuable role through its partnership with the state-run mass-vaccination site that was held at the Niagara Falls Conference Center this past year. Putting the total number of community vaccinations handled by Memorial at 75,489.

While Memorial is not required to administer vaccine clinics, we do so because of our unwavering commitment to serve the Niagara community.

Community service is our mission and our passion.

Collaboration is key when measuring the success of these initiatives, and one such partnership that Memorial values is that with the City of Niagara Falls.

"We are happy to continue to provide assistance to our city hospital," Niagara Falls Mayor Robert Restaino said. "NFMMC has been a tremendous partner with our administration in battling this virus. From our efforts to provide funding for testing early on last year, to our investment in the mobile unit just introduced by NFMMC, our investment in the hospital is an investment in our community."

For more information on Memorial's upcoming community vaccination clinics, visit nfmmc.org/vaccine.

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