

## **Q&A with Dr Wesley Miller, BHB Chief of Staff, and Judy Richardson, BHB Chief of Nursing**

*The Royal Gazette:* Is it a surprise and a concern that 26 percent of doctors have not been vaccinated yet?

Wesley Miller: "We would obviously want 100 percent of all our employees, including doctors, to be protected by the COVID-19 vaccine. They work tirelessly in a high risk Covid-19 environment every day and they deserve to get the best protection available which is the vaccine. We should recognise that doctors are actually the best protected group of healthcare workers at 74 percent and thank them for stepping up to the plate. This figure is continuing to rise as confidence in the efficacy and safety of the vaccine is proven over and over again. We should remember that the vaccination has only been available in Bermuda for three months – it's easy to forget because so much headway has been made in rolling the vaccine out."

RG: Are the reasons known?

WM: "We are beginning the more detailed work of better understanding the resistance to vaccination. This requires conversations, and listening to concerns, questions or issues. We promote the vaccine, how to get the vaccine and the research about the vaccine daily at the hospital. But individuals have concerns, beliefs and values that may mean they may be troubled by getting vaccinated for reasons that are personal, emotional, or historical. We need conversations that allow people to explore this as well as conversations that share facts and information."

RG: Is it surprising and concerning that half of the nursing staff have not been vaccinated?

Judy Richardson: "We are not alone in seeing about half of nurses vaccinated in what is only just over three months after the vaccine was offered in Bermuda. The numbers are rising so this is not the endpoint, but with the size of the surge we are currently experiencing we obviously want our staff protected as soon as possible. Our nurses are at the bedside in close contact with patients. Their risk is perhaps the highest of all our professional groups. We do obviously have protection with adequate personal protective equipment and infection control standards, but mistakes can happen, such as forgetting eye protection when going in to care for a patient, or getting used to working in a small team and becoming relaxed about masking at all times. Our nurses are the critical backbone of any healthcare service and getting vaccinated means not only their own personal safety and that of their families, but also ensures we don't end up with staff either getting sick or having to be quarantined when there are rising numbers of desperately ill patients in hospital."

RG: Are the reasons known?

JR: "While there is a lot of focus about misinformation, there are also valid questions and concerns, and a desire to see how effective and safe the vaccines prove to be. We had a number of staff interested in the AstraZeneca vaccine rather than Pfizer, so the new shipment may also encourage more people to roll up their sleeve. Certainly both vaccines work well and we are encouraged that more and more staff have been getting vaccinated each week."

RG: What is BHB doing to convince staff, particularly clinical staff, of the importance of being vaccinated?

JR: "We have a daily email newsletter that shares research, facts, figures, efficacy and safety data, and general promotions, we have shared interviews, case studies, videos, flyers, Q&A forums and education

sessions. There needs to be empathy and listening too, so we are also focusing on understanding different views and concerns, speaking to people where they are. While vaccination perspectives are often portrayed as for and against, the reality is much more nuanced and people are spread across a spectrum. There are some understandable concerns people have, and we need to work out as a healthcare organisation how to talk to each other so that people can discuss them. Vaccinated or not, these are our colleagues. We want as many people protected as possible, because we care for each other and we work closely together. We want our patients to feel safe around their healthcare providers, and for our staff to feel safe around their colleagues."

RG: How does having high BHB staff vaccination numbers help the hospital and the wider community?

WM: "There is the obligation for BHB to offer the best protection to its staff - we have made sure all staff know how they can easily book their vaccination. There is also a wider obligation for BHB to always be able to care for its community, a duty our staff would also feel. This means having staff who are at the lowest possible risk of getting sick themselves, transmitting the virus, or being on quarantine because they are not vaccinated. If we end up with too many staff off sick and on quarantine our ability to care can become compromised. The staff who are testing positive often do so from an initial community transmission, but they can infect their colleagues if they work together closely and don't adhere to strict precautions. The decision to get vaccinated is personal, but it has implications for all those around us and the risks we take on by not getting vaccinated become risks for all the people an individual works with and cares for. The fully vaccinated staff are less likely to contract the virus, and for the small number who do, they do not tend to get symptoms and can get back to work. Our unvaccinated staff are more likely to experience symptoms and may require longer off work, and are at much higher risk of serious illness, hospitalisation and death. It is impossible to argue with the fact that vaccination is working, but we are human beings and our decisions are based on many factors."