

Editorial

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Assalamo Alaikom

There is really only one topic at the top of peoples' minds at the moment; the new Covid19 vaccine. When we take a step back and consider the progress that has been made, it has been astounding. Amongst Allah's blessings is that we have discovered the vaccine and managed to make such strides in less than a year. Various diseases such as Malaria and HIV have been in circulation for far longer and little progress has been made on a vaccine for them so the strides on the Covid vaccine are extremely impressive.

No one denies the nightmare that is 2020, with just under 2 million dead worldwide and above 10,000 dying daily, those deaths equate to approximately 1 every 10 seconds. By the time you'll have read this editorial, around 30 people will have died from Covid worldwide. Those who have died are not merely numbers; they are parents, sons, daughters, husbands, wives, friends and loved ones. The immeasurable impact of their death will affect their families for a long, long time. As well as the fatalities it has brought upon us, the effect on daily life, peoples' livelihoods and the economy has been catastrophic. Covid has caused a huge rise in unemployment globally and has severely impacted the mental health of millions due to anxieties and forced social isolation. The importance of finding a vaccine is critical.

There is no doubt that we have to focus on the issue of the Covid vaccine and what is being spoken about it too. We are aware of social media amplifying stories and mistruths surrounding the vaccine which have no scientific basis whatsoever. As Muslims, we have a duty to ensure that what is being spoken about is accurate. There have been wild rumours which go beyond the scope of this editorial, but we need to admit that the so called "doctors of WhatsApp" are extremely problematic!

Allah (swt) says in the Quran that when you receive information from a distrusted source you cannot simply blindly accept it. You need to be sure about it and investigate:

"O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful"(Al Hujaraat, verse 6).

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصِيبُوا عَلَى مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ

Allah (swt) also says In the Holy Quran:

"And do not follow a thing about which you have no knowledge. Surely, the ear, the eye and the heart - each one of them shall be interrogated about." (Surat AL Israa, verse 36)

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا

Although it is vital that a Muslim questions and reflects and does not take anything at face value. We do not just follow for the sake of following. It is necessary however to leave the scientific debate on the issue of the vaccine to the experts in the field.

As Allah swt says the Quran:

"So, ask the people of knowledge if you do not know".(Surat Al Nahl, verse 43)

فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

Vaccine hesitancy is not new and people have questioned certain vaccines in the past. Questioning is not necessarily a bad thing but this debate should be left within the specialists of the field. It does not however mean that experts should not be listened to. We at BIMA through our national conference have brought together *Ulama* and experts in the field to discuss this issue. And we at BIMA have also [stated and published our evidence based position](#) towards the vaccine, which has been supported by a good number of Muslim organisations and *Ulama* in Britain. It is important to stress that experts in this field need not be Muslim. The Medicine and Healthcare product Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in the UK as well the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) in the USA have given the all clear for the vaccine to go

ahead. Medicine as a profession is fundamentally evidence based, and this is what gives doctors and experts legitimacy and ensures that the public trust in them is maintained. Doctors and other experts are trusted with their knowledge to provide the treatments and cures for so many diseases, so why should Covid be any different?

There is no doubt that the efforts of the *Ulama* and doctors have been heroic and we at BIMA have worked with both sides to solve many problems over the last 10 months and the issue of the vaccine is no different.

The vaccine may not prevent Covid itself, but most likely prevents the severe form of the disease and significantly decreases the risk of death. Vaccines have fully eradicated Smallpox and have decreased Polio, to the extent that the CDC (USA) predicted that by 2013, an additional 17 million people would have been infected and paralysed if it were not for a vaccine. Unfortunately, Polio is still an epidemic in 3 countries and sadly, all 3 are Muslim-majority (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria). So many of the sufferers of Covid are of BAME background so it is even more crucial that the vaccine is delivered. There needs to be a lobbying effort to ensure that BAME people are vaccinated quickly and early.

There is an oft-quoted argument by vaccine sceptics that herd immunity can be achieved by having 60% of the population infected therefore making the vaccine redundant. This would mean another 2 years of this existing nightmare and hundreds of thousands more dying and the lives of loved ones affected.

Amongst the most significant challenges is the delivery of the vaccine and actually vaccinating people as well as

ensuring that states can even buy vaccines. Plenty of states in the Global South with less developed healthcare systems will likely struggle with this. Another is to ensure that a vaccine covers all strains after inevitable viral mutations.

As Muslims, we believe in the Hadith of the prophet PBUH: "There is no disease that Allah has created, except that He also has created its treatment". What we understand from this Hadith is that we are encouraged to go out and make the effort to search and develop a cure as the protection of life is amongst the main 5 purposes of the Shariah.

It is worth mentioning that amongst the 2 most well-known scientists working on the recently developed Pfizer BioNTech vaccine are of Turkish and Muslim descent. They have left a remarkable imprint on the world; it is hoped that Muslim doctors, pharmacists and scientists can continue to do the same. Muslims have the ability to spread good, it is up to us to take it.

We as Muslims have to go beyond conspiracy theories. Our goals in life are so much bigger. The scholars in the Muslim golden age would never have been side-tracked by conspiracies and misinformation, their aims were so much higher. We have to aspire to be like them. It is our duty as Muslims.

Very best wishes,

Wassalam Alaikom.

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