

Office:
Level 9, Wits Medical School
7 York Road, Parktown, 2193

Postal:
Postnet Suite 199, Pvt Bag X2600
Houghton 2041

Secretariat: M: 083 536 6806/083 527 7196

assa@worldonline.co.za

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Response to recent public calls not to take the COVID-19 vaccine

The South African constitution allows for the right of choice as well as freedom of speech. An individual may choose not to have the Covid 19 vaccine, and an individual may exercise their freedom of speech and give voice to their opinions. However, individuals who are perceived as leaders whose opinions are listened to and often followed must apply discretion and consideration when publicly denouncing a public health initiative without scientific evidence or reference. The safety and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine has been demonstrated in numerous scientific publications, and the relatively few complications that have been associated with it may or may not have resulted as a consequence of vaccine administration.

The third COVID-19 wave resulted in immense pressure on both public and private health care sectors, any intervention that may mitigate the effects of a fourth wave should be supported until there is sound evidence that an intervention causes more harm than good and hence should not be provided. There is no such evidence for the COVID-19 vaccine.

We have a responsibility as Health Care Providers to protect our patients, our colleagues and ourselves by:

- Actively and aggressively combatting any forms of misinformation regarding COVID vaccine effectiveness and safety
- propagating accurate, evidence-based information about COVID vaccination
- ensuring that we ourselves are vaccinated and communicating this to our staff and family and patients and to the general public as evidence of our conviction that COVID vaccines are safe and effective

The Federation of Surgeons of South Africa and the South African Private Practitioners Forum supports the South African government with its efforts to vaccinate our population. We distance ourselves from individuals and organisations that spread unfounded opinions contradicting existing scientific evidence, which result in misinformation and may provoke actions that are harmful to individuals as well as our society.

