# Engaging psychiatrists in the COVID-19 vaccination effort: A quality improvement project to maximize vaccine uptake in clozapine-treated patients with SMI

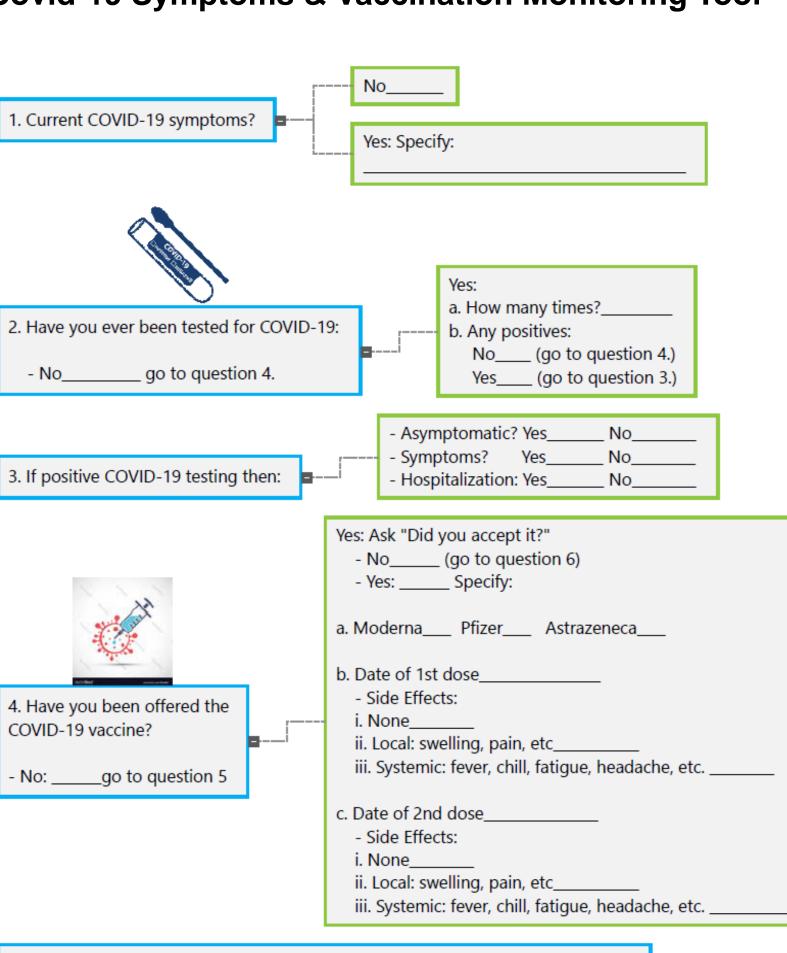


MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL

Carol Lim<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Manjola U. Van Alphen<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Sarah Maclaurin<sup>1,2</sup>, Oliver Freudenreich<sup>1,2,3</sup> <sup>1</sup>Massachusetts General Hospital <sup>2</sup>North Suffolk Mental Health Association <sup>3</sup>Harvard Medical School

### Background **Covid-19 Symptoms & Vaccination Monitoring Tool** • Individuals with serious mental illness (SMI) are at disproportionately high risk of Covid-19 infection and related morbidity and mortality.<sup>1</sup> • Vaccines represent the most effective preventive measure against 1. Current COVID-19 symptoms? Covid-19. • Psychiatrists are in frequent contact with their patients, hence uniquely-positioned to play a key role in shaping patients' vaccine attitudes and addressing barriers to vaccination.<sup>2</sup> Vaccine Hesitancy: Verbatim comments from the patients with SMI on clozapine I will not get the I'm immunized virus. I don't go because I already 3. If positive COVID-19 testing then: out much. had Covid-19 Vaccines haven't I want to been around long I'm concerned learn more enough, I want to about side about it. wait and see. effects. 4. Have you been offered the COVID-19 vaccine? I don't know My doctor has not No: \_\_\_\_\_go to question 5 what vaccine recommended it does. to me yet. **Method** • A quality improvement project was designed to help psychiatrists and nurse practitioners identify vaccine-hesitant patients and track Covid-19 vaccinations in a cohort of 250 clozapine-treated patients with SMI in a community mental health program. • In-service education and resources were provided to enhance Not enough info (wait and see)

- clinicians' vaccine knowledge and skills to draw on their expertise in nudging and motivational interviewing to resolve patients' ambivalence about vaccination.<sup>3</sup>
- A population-based management tool that tracks patients' vaccination intention, hesitancy, and uptake was created based on a literature review and embedded in the electronic medical record.



5. How likely are you to accept the Covid-19 vaccine is someone offers it to you? (on a 5-point scale, 1=very unlikely; 5=very likely)

6. What concerns do you have about the COVID-19 vaccine?

- I'm worried about side effects.

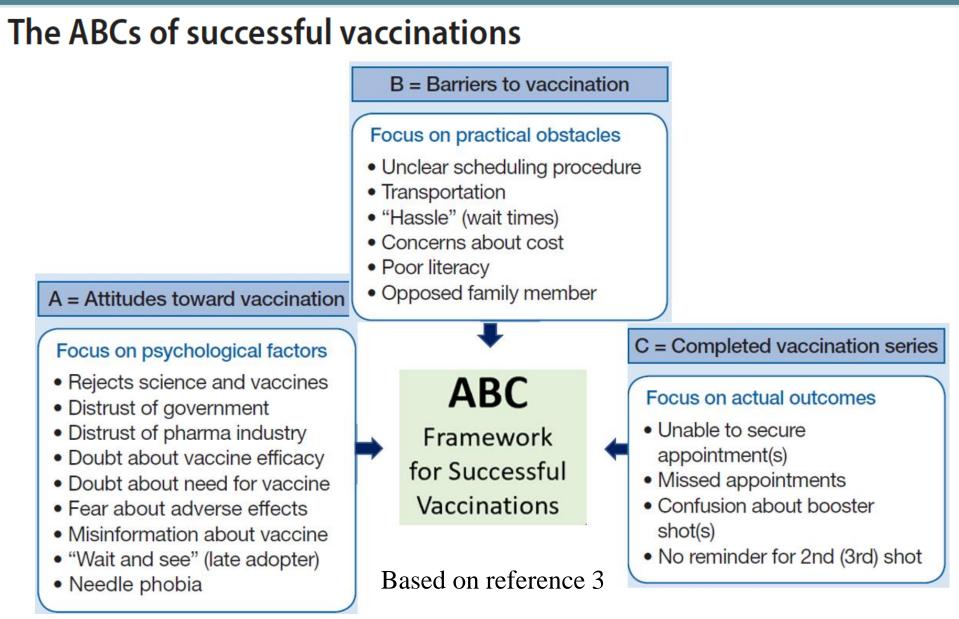
Needle phobia

Other (specify):\_

- Vaccine is not effective and cannot protect me.
- No need (I will not catch COVID19/COVID19 is harmless/already immunized by getting COVID19)
- Lack of trust (government / healthcare / pharma) Conspiracy theories (5G, microchipping, etc.)
- Hassle (scheduling / transportation / wait time / cost / crowds / answering questions)

## Result

- A semi-structured interview was conducted by clinicians at each visit based on a tool that was developed and implemented at a psychiatric outpatient practice, with progress note (EMR) tracking of responses.
- The actual vaccination rate in our clozapine cohort and its relationship to the level of vaccine hesitancy will be assessed at the end of June 2021.



# **Conclusion**

- Implementing a vaccination monitoring system into routine mental health practices promotes psychiatrist-driven vaccine discussion and may help achieve higher vaccination rates in this vulnerable population.
- The ABCs of successful vaccinations provide a framework that psychiatrists can use when speaking with their patients about vaccinations.<sup>3</sup>
- Psychiatric patients, particularly those who are marginalized, have much to gain if psychiatrists are involved in preventive health care.<sup>3</sup>

### References

- 1. Mazereel, V., Van Assche, K., Detraux, J., & De Hert, M. (2021). COVID-19 vaccination for people with severe mental illness: why, what, and how? The Lancet Psychiatry. S2215-0366(20)30564-2. Advance online publication.
- *Clinical therapeutics*, 39(8), 1550-1562.
- 3. Freudenreich, O., Van Alphen, M., & Lim, C. (2021). The ABCs of successful vaccinations: A role for psychiatry. *Current Psychiatry*, 20(3), 48-49.



2. McClure, C. C., Cataldi, J. R., & O'Leary, S. T. (2017). Vaccine hesitancy: where we are and where we are going.