

Case Study – “I Don’t Trust It.” Vaccine Hesitancy During a Pandemic



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Case Study

Sam (age 54) and Rebecca (age 56) Johnson are chatting with their neighbor and family friend Dr. Irving. During the friendly talk, the topic of COVID-19 vaccines comes up. Dr. Irving says that he just got his second dose to be fully vaccinated but that it really “knocked me down for two days.” At this, Sam and Rebecca both say that is one of the reasons they do not think they will get the vaccine. Dr. Irving is surprised by this and politely asks about other reasons. “I don’t trust it, mostly because of how fast it was approved. We are still working on an HIV vaccine, but they can make a COVID one in a year? I don’t believe it,” says Sam. Rebecca then adds, “I also just don’t see the point. We have been working from home and socially distancing for a year. I never got it. Sam had it, but it was mild and only lasted a few days. So really, what’s the point?”

Dr. Irving started to address some of the points but did not want to alienate or endanger their friendship. All the major points that he made -- that vaccines benefit everyone and trying to reach herd immunity is important -- the Johnsons just brushed off and said they still do not want to be “guinea pigs.” Near the end, Rebecca said she is maybe 50/50 on the vaccine, and Sam is one hundred per cent against it. Dr. Irving reached out to several ethics committee members, knowing they have been working extensively on this, requesting conversation styles and techniques for further discussion with the Johnsons.