

Health care practitioners urged to use motivational interviewing to help resolve vaccine hesitancy

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Researchers from The University of New Mexico and University of Pittsburgh say health care practitioners should consider the empathic and

nonconfrontational approach of motivational interviewing—to help patients explore and resolve COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy or uncertainty.

They say motivational interviewing has been successful in helping change other health-related behaviors such as quitting smoking and drugs, managing diabetes and decreasing general [vaccine hesitancy](#).

According to CDC data, nearly 23% of the population has not been vaccinated, and researchers say vaccine hesitancy is thought to be one explanatory factor for why these individuals are not vaccinated. To help address the current vaccine hesitancy that's happening on a global scale, UNM Research Assistant Professor Dr. Cassie Boness collaborated with Dr. Antoine Douaihy, who specializes in addiction psychiatry and is an expert in motivational interviewing, and medical student Mackenzie Nelson from the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt).

Researchers say vaccination continues to be one of the most important ways to slow the transmission of preventable diseases, such as COVID-19, as well as lowering the risk of serious side effects of the illness. They also argue that often times individuals who are hesitant to get vaccinated have valid concerns, however, society tends to shame or stigmatize them, which can create further tension and may result in the individual "doubling down" or becoming more set in their reasons against getting vaccinated when approached about their hesitancy.

That's why Boness and Pitt say that an empirically based approach is needed to help understand and resolve the phenomenon into COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy that's spreading globally.

"We emphasize motivational interviewing is an important approach to use until there is more evidence for COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy [specific interventions](#)," Boness said.

Boness and her team offer a three-step approach, grounded in the spirit, skills and strategies of motivational interviewing, that they say health care practitioners can use to discuss COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy with their patients. Motivational interviewing is a research-based approach that uses a conversational style for strengthening a person's own motivation and commitment to make a given behavioral change. Researchers say, in this case, it can be used to strengthen an individual's commitment towards public health behaviors. The approach includes listening and understanding to an individual's position in a way that's nonjudgmental, neutral and compassionate. In return, researchers say this helps to create partnership between the participants (e.g., physician and patient).

"Medical appointments are a perfect window of motivational opportunity to address ambivalence about getting COVID-19 vaccine," Douaihy said. "Using the [motivational interviewing](#) guiding and non-confrontational empathic approach that involves asking, listening mindfully and informing facilitates addressing and resolving ambivalence about receiving COVID-19 [vaccine](#)."

The researchers recently recorded a [podcast](#) to share this information from their study.

Provided by University of New Mexico

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