The Association of Black Nursing Faculty, Inc (ABNF) recognizes that the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to have a devastating impact on Americans’ health, primarily ethnic minorities. Remarkably, ethnic minorities continue to have more COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and higher mortality rates than their White counterparts. African Americans and Latinos are 2.8 times more likely to die from COVID, while Native Americans are 2.6 times more likely than Caucasians (CDC, 2020a). The high mortality rates seen in African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans are attributable to multiple factors such as life-threatening comorbidities, socioeconomic factors, and occupation-related COVID exposure risks among frontline, essential, and critical infrastructure workers (CDC, 2020a). Additionally, inadequate access to quality healthcare hinders diagnosis and treatment of COVID within ethnic minority communities. In the wake of recent emergency approval of multiple COVID vaccines, there are new threats to COVID treatment in African American communities—fear and suspicion. Fear of the medical community is historical and well-documented. Racial and ethnic disparities and medical atrocities such as the United States Public Health Service Syphilis Study at Tuskegee (i.e., the Tuskegee Syphilis Study), the Sims’ gynecological study on enslaved Black women, and John Hopkins’ Henrietta Lacks cancer study serve as consistent reminders of how untrustworthy the healthcare system can be toward African Americans. African Americans must set aside this troubled past, trust science, and get inoculated.

ABNF, a historically Black nursing organization, seeks to assist African American communities to better understand the science supporting vaccine administration, to promote fairness in its delivery, and to ensure that ethnic minority communities and other marginalized groups gain access to the COVID vaccine. The widespread inoculation of the COVID-19 vaccine is essential to flattening the curve, building herd immunity, and reducing infectivity in the United States. Therefore, ABNF calls for the fair and equitable distribution of the COVID vaccine, focusing on social justice and reducing COVID-related health disparities. ABNF agrees with the CDC (2020b) that we should supply the vaccine to the following groups in the initial phase of distribution due to limited supply: elderly (i.e., 65 and above), those with comorbidities, health care employees, and frontline, essential and critical industry workers.

Overview

African Americans remain a minority group within the United States representing only 13.4% of the population, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.). However, African Americans are 37% more likely to die from COVID than Whites (Keating et al., 2020). The disproportionate death rate in African Americans is impacted, in part, by health disparities, social factors such as income, housing and employment as frontline, essential or critical industry workers (Cilluffo et al., 2017). Health disparities have devastated African American communities and are an ongoing issue which deserve to be vigorously addressed by local, state and national government. While untoward social determinants of health are notable and actionable factors in contracting the virus, accessing quality treatment and historical mistrust of the healthcare system can derail vaccination efforts in African American communities. These fears are neither misguided nor unfounded. They are rooted in the medical and social mistreatment of African Americans from slavery to present-day.

African Americans have literature supported reasons for their continued suspicion of the medical community (Arnett et al., 2016). Moreover, this mistrust has been found to delay treatment efforts for communicable diseases such as HIV as well as preventive screening efforts (Adams et al., 2017; Kalichman et al., 2017). It is very probable that medical mistrust will hamper African American COVID vaccination rates. For instance, a recent Pew Research report indicates, only 42% of African Americans surveyed report willingness to get the COVID vaccination when compared to Latinos (63%) and Whites (61%) (Funk and Tyson, 2020). Unless a concerted effort is made to address the historical fears of this community and provide them with practical information and examples to alleviate their concerns, we will continue to experience difficulties with efforts to successfully vaccinate African American communities.

Recommendations

ABNF supports a systematic distribution of COVID-19 vaccines beginning with at-risk segments of the population to include early vaccination of nurses, especially public health nurses, and other frontline health care workers, elderly persons, persons with comorbidities and workers employed by frontline, essential and critical industries. Additionally, ABNF supports and expects transparency in data collection and provision of public access to information regarding side-effects and adverse reactions during all phases of the vaccines’ use. We support provision of plain language materials to the public to assist with ease of public understanding. Further, we expect fair and equitable distribution of the vaccines. It is also impor-
Promoting COVID-19 Vaccine Dissemination among African Americans

ABNF, Inc ● P.O. Box 580 ● Lisle, IL 60532 ● www.abnf.net

Policy Brief

References


