

Blog: 25/7/2021

Saturday 7th August we are opening for vaccinations only all day from 9am. While we can take some walk-ins we prefer to make appointments as then we can then calculate how many phials to remove from the fridge and makeup without wasting any expensive drop, avoiding shortages and waiting times for those already booked in.

Well we are still doing the COVID jabs, at a slower daily rate through this past vaccine shortage time, but we now hope to ramp it back up to 2 vaccinators - Monday to Friday and even on Saturdays if there is the demand. We are happy to do everyone now in our area as we are still the only vaccinator in Papakura, Drury, Karaka, Kingseat, Waiau Pa, Clarkes Beach and Clevedon-Kawa Kawa Bay. Please tell everyone we are doing the vaccinations and to ring into 09-2980778 to make an appointment. The more people we get vaccinated makes it safer for our families, our elderly and vulnerable, for our disabled, pregnant mums, children and babies.

Needle phobia is real and for some people very, very scary. Please don't let it dissuade you or anyone you know from having the vaccinations. It is manageable. We can help if you come and talk with us before the vaccination, or talk with your own doctor about it. A simple little 1/2-1mg lorazepam tablet can relax you if it's very bad, but best trick I know is come and be done at the same time as a good friend or bring other family with you. You can come in twos or threes [or more] if necessary. Just tell the receptionist when you book or when you come that's what you want to do.

The hot topic this last few weeks still seems to about the development of immunity and how long it lasts and there really is some confusing information out there. As I have said in previous blogs the timing of that second one is a minimum of three weeks, but for this Pfizer -Biontech one, it may be better up to eight weeks. I say 'may' as the studies that are following up vaccinated patients are often measuring different parts of the immune system so it's hard to get a good picture of what's going on.

The follow-up studies in Israel are our best and biggest indicator. These are looking at blood tests on serology, the body reaction in the beta immune system after any infection. After any virus or bacterial infection these results are always high but drop off at different rates depending mainly on type of infection and how sick the person got. How well the body remembers the infection then comes into play, the so-called memory cells. Since the body can't remember absolutely everything, so there is editing happening here with memories of mild infections and unusual infections removed first. That's why the second vaccination dose is important as it tells the body that this is not an unusual infection, it can happen again so get prepared to zap it fast. It doesn't help to know exactly what to look for in the blood, vessel linings, gut linings, spleen and lymph glands [the immune system concentrated areas but it's all over even in the brain in the astrocyte cells] that while we used to think of the human immune system as two distinct halves, the Beta Cells and the T cells, we now know

they talk to each other much more than we used to believe, and in a far more complex way especially in the way immune memory is stored. It's a bit hard to get samples everywhere especially in places like the brain but we do know from Long Covid these brain immunity cells are involved. Larger studies are difficult to do to watch all these interactions in a meaningful way, but they are being done. They could be another year or a few off reporting unless the immunity drop-off is fast – and there are built in alarm bells on all these studies to warn us if this happens and these studies will report this immediately [and all the medical scientific world is watching] – so we will not know for ages if and when booster doses are needed.

Anything about the need for booster doses before these bigger studies report is speculation, hope and false news. Some could even be Big Pharma trying to extend out the boost in their share prices! I can wait. I'm happy that Israel seems to have been able to nearly achieve herd immunity despite having delta variant cases with 64% population having had one dose and 58% having had two doses. If you take out the under 16ys group which is approximately 30% of the population that means they are up to 88-94% adult population which is an incredible achievement. They also have started vaccinating 12-16year olds this month. We hope to soon too.

Some vaccines are not achieving as good a results. The Sinovac out of China seems to provoke a far lower level of immunity and despite China's very commendable efforts to get it out fast and to the Third World, it seems to be about 50% effective at best. Indonesia is noticing this at the moment as the delta variant runs amok and vaccinated hospital staff are sick and dying. There are lots of other COVID vaccines not doing well either. Vaccinations are as different from each other as pills are: think a fluvax is as different to a tetanus vaccination as say a blood pressure pill is from a laxative! Different ingredients, different actions, different targets sites, different lengths of immunity and different side effects. Then even vaccinations going after the same target as COVID vaccinations are, are as different from each other as the different blood pressure pills or antibiotics are from each other.

On behalf of our patients and me, I am still very grateful that our government chose the Pfizer-Biontech one. Even if it is difficult to manage. Another great pat on the back for our Ministry of health in Wellington and the NZ Defence forces getting Pfizer vaccinations out to our furthest-out corner, the Tokelau's three main atolls this week. Incredible logistics coping with lack of reliable constant electricity and no -70°C fridges, storms and rough seas and no airfield access. Wow! What an adventure.

Dr Terrillian Hui leaves us this week to go permanently to Turuki Healthcare in Mangere. All the staff have enjoyed her six months with us as a Registrar, and know she will do well as she gets on well with patients, cares and is keen to know more. We have a new Registrar, Dr Hazel Wilkes starting after next week who is here until end January 2022. From all the rather expanded team at Tiakina Te Ora, ma te wa, and thank you for all your support.

