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## **April 8: AND Notes Still have COVID patients; Vaccines and Hesitancy are here;**

I have no COVID patients in the hospital but I still have COVID patients. They are at risk for the development of significant complications but thus far these patients have lucked out. We keep learning new information about this virus and its effect on human beings. From a mental health point of view, it appears that suicides have gone down but drug abuse overdoses have significantly increased. According to the [National Center for Health Statistics](#), suicides totaled fewer than 45,000 in 2020, down from about 47,500 in 2019 and more than 48,000 in 2018. This appears to be true globally. In contrast, drug overdoses — also appeared to increase dramatically last year: The [latest data](#) shows there were more than 88,000 overdose deaths in the year through August 2020, up from nearly 70,000 in the same time period of 2019.

Vaccination together with well-established public health practices, such as mask wearing and social distancing, are key to defeating the COVID-19 pandemic. Should health care workers [be required](#) to get a vaccine? While I am supportive of effort to [convince health care workers to get the vaccine](#), I do believe that health care workers should be required to get the vaccine. I cannot work without the flu vaccine. [The same should eventually apply to the COVID vaccine.](#)

On April 6, researchers documented in [a paper](#) undergoing peer review that vaccination not only protects the person being vaccinated but leads to lower community infection rates. I spend about a quarter of my time with each patient discussing the pros and cons of the vaccine; and yes patients have asked me about the computer chip that they are sure is being implanted when someone gets the vaccine. A [recent excellent article](#) reviews vaccine hesitancy among marginalized populations. Yet we are confronted with the reality that significant portions of the American population ([Republicans](#) especially [evangelicals](#); minority groups) are vaccine hesitant. In fact, certain parts of the American body politic are demonizing science and the people who develop and convey its benefits such as [Dr Anthony Fauci](#). Simply put this has led to the reality that all parts of American society, are at risk if we do not encourage vaccine acceptance and public health practices.

Though there is a [political risk](#) for their engagement, corporations have a key part to play in this effort. If nothing else, all Americans including those who work in corporations are at economic risk if we do not defeat this pandemic. Simply put, normal life and a vibrant economy are of interest to all including corporations. Via AND I am engaging with several corporations.

We can now travel – at least according to the CDC. I am going to take a wait and see attitude. Certainly unless I have an emergency I am not getting on a plane anytime soon. But if you do get there are [suggested tips](#).

In the just passed bill, 50 billion is to go for [contact tracers](#). Almost a year ago, together with other colleagues I [wrote a paper](#) stating that contact tracers/ community health care workers could be the foundation of a renewed connection between the public health system and the “sickness” health system. I am still hoping and pushing for states to apply for federal waivers.

Lastly, the COVID pandemic has resulted in the death of [more than 3600 health care workers](#). Maritza Beniquez, an emergency room nurse at Newark’s University Hospital in New Jersey, [watched 11 colleagues die](#) in the early months of the pandemic. Like the patients they had been treating, most were Black and Latino. “It literally decimated our staff,” she said.

We still have many challenges regarding this pandemic, including the surge and more young adults being affected. This pandemic has revealed the true inequities of our society. In fact, we have failed in one of the most basic functions of society – protecting the most vulnerable. But I am cautiously optimistic as we finally have a federal administration that appears fairly organized and, at a minimum, is truly integrating science into its policies and practices.