



Tap pharmacists to vaccinate too

As we all know, the best way to arrest the spread of Covid-19 is by achieving herd immunity, which means vaccinating 80% of Malaysia's population.

There are 32.7 million people in the country; 23.5% are aged between zero and 14 years old and are not eligible for the vaccine. The remaining 76.5% - 24 million people - must be vaccinated, and quickly. (The 24 million excludes foreign and undocumented workers.)

To date, approximately 1.3 million people have been fully vaccinated and we are working with an average of 75,000 doses administered daily. We face challenges such as the availability of vaccines, enough personnel and centres for vaccination, and the populace's acceptance rate.

One of the best performing countries in Covid-19 vaccination is the United States. About 41% of its population has completed two doses, with an average of 1.7 million doses administered daily. This is driven by many factors, from improved execution to the public's increasing acceptance of the vaccine.

There is one significant step that is likely a big contributor to the good numbers: President Joe

Biden's administration started shipping vaccine doses directly to pharmacies.

A few weeks ago about 6,500 pharmacies began distributing a million doses per week, rising to up to two million in the next phase.

In the United States, 36 states permit vaccine administration by pharmacists as part of the scope of pharmacy practice.

The American College of Physicians and the American Society of Internal Medicine support pharmacists as sources of immunisation information, hosts of immunisation sites, and immunisers.

In Britain, more than 1.7 million Covid-19 doses have been administered at community pharmacies. In Australia, pharmacies began to vaccinate recently. In France, the government has said it will engage all health professionals - including pharmacists - in mass vaccination when more doses are available.

Lombardy, Italy, is the latest region to agree that pharmacists may administer Covid-19 vaccinations, joining the Piedmont region which began in January 2021. In Portugal, the involvement of pharmacies is being explored to increase vaccination capacity. A similar



Community service: A pharmacist administering a Covid-19 vaccine at a pharmacy in Canada in April. - Bloomberg

stance is being examined in Japan.

Closer to home, pharmacists in the Philippines, under the umbrella of the Philippine National Deployment and Vaccination Plan for Covid-19 Vaccines, started administering jobs in February.

In Malaysia, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister and coordinating minister of the National Covid-19 Immunisation Programme Khairy Jamaluddin has said that we will be receiving 12 million doses of Sinovac vaccine by end July while

25 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine are expected to arrive in the third quarter of this year.

The minister is aiming to deliver 200,000 doses daily by July. We are mulling more vaccination centres, including 1,000 private GP clinics.

Ex-deputy Health Minister Dr Lee Boon Chye proposed that we should target 300,000 injections a day to achieve 80% immunisation by the end of 2021.

Currently, we have approximately 5,000 pharmacists serving in around 3,200 community pharmacies throughout the country, as well as 21,000 active registered pharmacists who are willing to help in speeding up the Covid-19 vaccination programme.

We urge the relevant authorities to seriously consider including pharmacists as part of the national immunisation programme. We may be able to hasten vaccination of the already-registered-and-waiting public. With herd immunity, we can arrest the pandemic and hopefully return to our "old" normal sooner.

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