

Guest columnist Dr. Jonathan Schwab: A community coming together to keep each other safe



Shots of COVID-19 vaccine for children are prepared, Wednesday, Nov. 3, at Children's National Hospital in Washington. AP

It is easy to feel that we are living in a troubled time with so much division expressed in so many ways. Nationally, we have blue and red states with strong opinions on either side of important issues such as the U.S. budget, voting rights, abortion, climate change, etc. Locally, we have equally strong opinions on what art is shown in our galleries, how to renovate our downtown, and even the cutting down of cherry trees.

So, during these challenging times, I would like to share with you a heartwarming story on how communities and people can come together to solve problems.

Two weeks ago, we were trying to figure out how our pediatric practice could organize a COVID vaccine clinic upon the expected approval of this vaccine for children ages 5 to 11. We had done this before with other vaccines, but this time, we were having difficulties getting enough of our already overworked and understaffed group of nurses to work the necessary additional hours. We were close to having to say we could not give the vaccine.

In a last-ditch effort to make this valuable service available, we decided to send out a notice to the parents of our patients and local school nurses, requesting help from anyone with experience administering shots to kids. We quickly received over 50 volunteers offering to help get the kids vaccinated.

What a truly overwhelming response for which we are so grateful. It showed us that people care deeply about our community and want to help each other stay healthy. This was an instance of people coming together to solve a problem, rather than dividing people and creating more problems, as seems to happen so often these days.

In addition to compensating the people who have stepped forward to help out in this way, all of us at Northampton Area Pediatrics would like to give them a big round of applause and a huge "thank you!" for their gracious and generous offers to help the children of our community. As well, we would like to express our appreciation of the efforts of many others who have volunteered in similar clinics throughout the Pioneer Valley; and the work done by Meredith O'Leary, Kate Kelly and the City of Northampton's Health Department in giving such exemplary guidance on how to mobilize people who are willing to give and connect them with those who are in need.

We appreciate all that they have done to keep our community safe. They have bucked the trend of divisiveness, helping us instead unite as a community.

By: Jonathan Schwab MD is medical director of Northampton Area Pediatrics.