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Maximising the Benefits of a COVID-19 Vaccine: Getting the Psychology Right

The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) has released a guidance document entitled '**Maximising the Benefits of a COVID-19 Vaccine: Getting the Psychology Right**'. With the COVID-19 vaccine being rolled out this week in the United Kingdom (UK), the PSI's guidance document draws attention to the challenge of preparing for adequate vaccine uptake and the importance of how public health advice related to the vaccine is prepared.

Many psychological factors influence whether people avail of vaccination in sufficient numbers for it to be effective. International experience of vaccine hesitancy suggests that the behavioural aspects of vaccination requires the urgent attention of policy makers. The PSI's Science and Public Policy Committee (SPPC) were to the fore in preparing the Society's guidance.

Professor Brian Hughes, SPPC member and Professor of Psychology at NUI Galway, stated: "Most people hold favourable views about vaccination. As such, the attention given to vaccine scepticism can often be disproportionate. Nonetheless, it is important to address queries about vaccination in non-threatening ways, in the knowledge that most vaccine hesitancy results from barriers to motivation and not from hostile attitudes."

Professor Hughes added: "The best available research tells us that vaccination programmes are most effective when they are routinised within standard healthcare, when they are easy to access, and when they are straightforward to navigate."

Challenges such as vaccine hesitancy and refusal are important components in getting the psychology right when it comes to the COVID-19 vaccine. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that vaccine hesitancy leads to around 1.5 million deaths around the world each year. Most of these are of children whose parents did not avail of vaccination. The COVID-19 pandemic itself presents other various challenges such as emotional distress, the spread of conspiracy theories, and the concept of herd immunity.

The PSI guidance examines personal and social psychological factors that influence vaccination uptake, both of which need to be addressed when preparing public health advice about vaccines for COVID-19. It is vital that adequate preparation is undertaken for optimal vaccine uptake, with the PSI suggesting the following:

- Vaccination systems should seek to engage people directly, rather than wait for public attitudes to evolve;
- Vaccine uptake is highest when vaccines are seen as part of everyday life and healthcare;
- Public figures and other role models should be consistent in their statements about vaccination;
- Reservations about vaccines should be acknowledged and addressed in a non-threatening manner;
- Bolstering popular conscientiousness about vaccines serves as psychological “inoculation” against future apathy.

Mr Mark Smyth, President of the Psychological Society of Ireland stated: “The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn attention to the issue of vaccine hesitancy. The opportunity presented should allow for a wider discussion of vaccination, and a greater awareness of the problems caused by insufficient vaccine uptake. Finding ways to enhance vaccine coverage now will serve humanity well in coming decades, given the increasing likelihood of similar pandemics in the future.”

ENDS.

For further information, or to arrange an interview with PSI spokespersons, please contact:

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Note to Editor

- [Click here to view](#) ‘**Maximising the Benefits of a COVID-19 Vaccine: Getting the Psychology Right**’ document in full
- The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), with circa 3,500 members, is the learned and professional body for Psychology in the Republic of Ireland.
- Mr Mark Smyth, Chartered Senior Clinical Psychologist, is the current PSI President and has a deep interest in anxiety, suicide and the psychology of social media, politics and policing.
- Prof. Brian Hughes, Professor of Psychology at NUI Galway, is a researcher in behavioural health science and a specialist in the psychological aspects of social issues and public policy. He is a Fellow of PSI and a former PSI President.