



**CIPRIANI COLLEGE**  
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES



# WORK MATTERS

**COLUMN**

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# To Mandate or Not to Mandate

A seven day new cases average of 540 with 2,825 deaths in two years and we can't seem to come close to a decent discussion on what to do for the public good. In the greatest health care crisis of our time we have Trump-like posturing intended only to inflame our own sides.

Managing a national disaster requires both decisive leadership action and social consensus. And there are things that simply don't work when one attempts to build the collective effort required to deal with a national disaster. Policy by decree isn't helpful unless you're in an authoritarian state. People know more, demand more and deserve to be involved more in democratic decision making. After two years, waiting for the other side to go first probably doesn't help as much as putting your own ideas out there. Finally, demonizing people with different views or interests tends not to lead to compromise, and make no mistake, social consensus requires compromise.

Let me declare my interests. I'm fully vaccinated and will boost when possible. I do not trust the science because I believe in being skeptical about all truth claims, scientific, religious or otherwise. Facebook is not 'doing research'. I am deeply concerned about civil liberties but am kind'a addicted to breathing and I'm opposed to endangering others in pursuit of my liberties. While I accept mistrust of medical science and of government, I do not do unproven conspiracy theories. Truth will out, but until then we must contend with the fact that people are dying. On average I'm tending towards mandates but I don't live in the world by myself. So then how to square the circle? The only answer is to search all possible options, easy or not, whether I like them or not.

Statistics suggest that vaccination has been the best weapon in the pandemic. Nothing else has proven as effective in protecting the public. Being unvaccinated is proving to be associated with increased levels of infection, hospitalization and death. Let's stop short though of saying that all unvaccinated people will die and all vaccinated people are safe.

But exactly what does a vaccine mandate mean? Following the science, the concept of herd immunity is never 100 percent. If so then mandating vaccination does not mean vaccinate everyone. There must be legitimate exceptions on the basis of health, religion or something else that I can't picture right now. We need therefore to spend some time working out a consensus on what constitutes legitimate exceptions. Maybe then we can find out what the real size of the problematic unvaccinated population is and discover appropriate options.

Another important question we might ask is what constitutes being vaccinated? The point of vaccines is the production of antibodies to fight the virus. Canadian policy treats infection survivors as vaccinated. Perhaps instead of just counting 'jabs' (such a ridiculous word) we should also count antibodies as a way of fulfilling a vaccine mandate.

The term anti-vaxxer is useless. Let's take it out of the discussion. A radical option is to treat people's vaccine concerns as legitimate and with respect. This allows us to enter into a rational discussion with the possibility of conversion or compromise. Again, there may be fewer crazies, on both sides, than we think. Many concerns may possibly be addressed by information and by entertaining a greater diversity of ideas. Why shouldn't people be concerned about the issue of liability in the context of a mandate? By the same token should objectors without legitimate exemption not bear some reasonable responsibility for protecting the rest of us? And are there acceptable waystations, like testing, free and/or at cost? Continuous testing is standard practice across Europe where it is used in tandem with vaccine mandates and various versions of safe spaces. So surely we can build context specific combinations of similar options tailored to the degree and nature of risk faced in the working and social environment.

This raises another interesting question. Is a mandate limited to a mandate? Are there other things involved

that need to be worked out in both operational detail and consequence? The mandate is clearly an integral part of the idea of safe zones. Is it not then reasonable for people to want details on safe zone establishment and integrity protection? Is frank and open debate not the best way to achieve this? And are there other possible answers out there that we can create, adopt or adapt?

The bottom line is that there is room in the debate for reason and nuance without the assumption of a monopoly on truth, justice and humanity. But we actually have to, well... debate; clearly, fairly, respectfully and inclusively. Maybe if we focus on the goal of saving lives rather than being right or loud or scoring political points, then maybe we can rise above this crass ugliness that passes for public discourse and find a consensus that represents the public good. If we do not learn from the mistakes we have already made in this pandemic how prepared will we be for the next? 2,825 family and friends, and counting.

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