Digital Event/Webinar: Tackling vaccine-hesitancy in the Sikh Community

Monday 25 January, 2021

Last Thursday, Sikh Council UK (SCUK) organised a National COVID-19 Vaccine Webinar in partnership with NHS. The event was a huge success with around 150 participants, including prominent leaders in the UK Sikh Community. A large number of Sikh healthcare professionals attended and asked important questions specifically relevant to the Sikh and South-Asian community.

The expert panel addressed key concerns surrounding the ingredients, safety, testing, and roll-out of the vaccine. Panellists included:

- Professor Anthony Harnden, Deputy Chairman of the Joint Committee of Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI)
- Dr Raghib Ali, Senior Clinical Research Associate at the MRC Epidemiology Unit at the University of Cambridge and an Honorary Consultant in Acute Medicine at the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust.
- Dr Harpreet Sood, NHS England Associate Chief Clinical Information Officer, Global Digital Health Advisor.
- Dr Sukhdev Singh, Senior GP in Birmingham for 32 years, voted by GP's as one of the top 100 GP's 2020, chairman of Sikh Doctors Association.
- Dr Pavan Minhas, speciality registrar in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. She is an advocate for women's health and passionate about providing women with evidence based information in clear and easily understandable format on her social media platform @doctorpavan.

Sukhjeevan Singh, founder of Jyoti Saroop Foundation (JSF) and former spokesperson of the SCUK, hosted the event. He emphasised the need to empower the community in making informed choices and that generally, medicine and Sikh teachings were not at odds. He said, "submission to medical interventions such as vaccination should always be on a choice-basis. This is reflected in the current law. Saying that, reports show a low acceptance of the vaccination in the South Asian community, which is a cause of great concern."

Secretary-General SCUK, Gurpreet Singh Anand said, "The high level of myth and rumour on social media about the various COVID-19 vaccines has caused lots of questions to emerge from within the Sikh community. The SCUK felt it was important to allow questions to be answered by those in the medical field. The webinar brought together a wealth of expertise in a broad panel to look at both the medical and faith questions posed in respect of the vaccinations."

Next steps include broadcasting the webinar to various Sikh Media Outlets (TV/Radio/Web Channels) and producing easy-to-digest information, i.e. pamphlets in Punjabi and English ease vaccine-hesitancy in the community.

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