



From the Editor

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Let's Help End This Pandemic

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as of May 4, 2021, 37.8% of people in the United States over age 18 years were fully protected; 56.3% of eligible people have gotten at least one shot. Unfortunately, the pace is slowing due to vaccine hesitancy, especially among rural residents and some individuals who believe the risks from the virus are overblown. Communities of color are also behind because lack of health services and transportation have been barriers to access (Sun, 2021).

Vaccine hesitancy is a huge problem for the United States for several reasons (Yan, 2021). First, we need at least 70% to 85% of the populations immunized to reach herd immunity. Furthermore, the longer people stay unvaccinated, the more chances a virus has to develop mutations, and significant mutations could lead to more worrisome strains current vaccines might be unable to address. Finally, we now know for some individuals, even young ones, the lingering effects of COVID-19 infection (e.g., brain fog, chest pains, shortness of breath) can be long-term and quite serious.

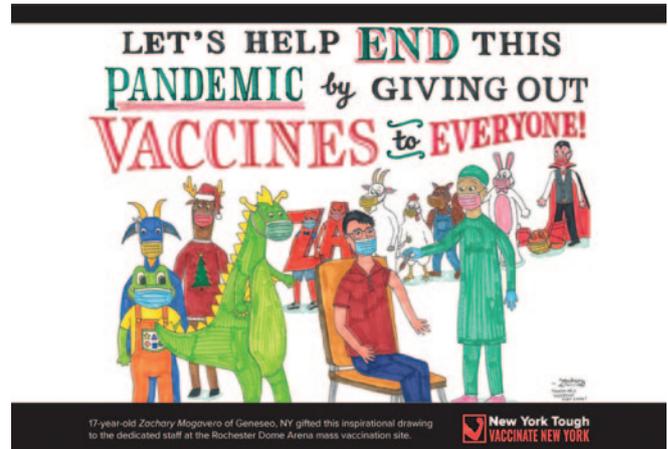
All three drug companies with vaccines authorized for emergency use in the United States are currently conducting trials with children younger than age 16 years. In fact, in May 2021, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) granted expansion of the emergency approval of the COVID-19 vaccine to include its use in adolescents ages 12 to 15 years. Currently, only 31.8% of our *total* population has full immunity (CDC, 2021); therefore, this approval brings us closer to achieving herd immunity. Trials are underway with younger children, too, all with the nation's strong desire to get children safely back in school and put this terrible period in our history behind us.

A Grateful Teen and Advocate

Zachary Mogavero, a 17-year old boy on the autism spectrum, is not only grateful for getting vaccinated, but he believes it is important to inspire others to get vaccinated, too. On his way to receiving the second dose of the vaccine at the Rochester Dome Arena vaccination site in Geneseo, New York, the teen created a work of art that expresses his experience of becoming immunized and sends the message to fellow New Yorkers, "Let's help end this pandemic by giving out vaccines to everyone!" (see Figure 1).

Zachary's piece might be considered a form of graphic medicine – the use of comics to tell personal stories of illness and health: "The combined language of words and pictures that is the comic medium gives approachability and emotional impact to these personal stories, and even to the clinical data they sometimes include" (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2020). This type of art combines the explicit meaning of words and symbols with the abstract expressiveness of art to create the unique, multi-layered language of comics.

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Source: Courtesy of Zachary Mogavero. Printed with permission.

In his colorful illustration, Zachary depicts himself getting immunized. He was eager to get the vaccine, knowing this was one way that could help his life get back to normal. We see the Z and A in the background; Zachary loves the alphabet, A to Z. He also included Leap Frog Baby Tad, his favorite stuffed animal, along with many of his other beloved characters, all masked and lined up for their injections. The images he included show graphic medicine can also include humor.

His mother, Jani, says Zach likes to draw for various reasons (e.g., when he is happy, when he is sad, when he is anxious, when he wants to remember something). As many people have discovered, creating art can be a means of processing things. For example, a few years ago, Zach's good friend was killed by a car when running alongside a road. From time to time, Zachary draws a picture of his friend, perhaps his way of continuing to process the event and remembering her.

Zachary's art exemplifies one of the many areas where individuals with autism can have great abilities (Mullin, 2014). His family realized early on that Zach has a creative eye. Nurturing such talent is important. Because Zach loves making signs for friends and family members, his family purchased a CNC (computer numerical control) wood router to support his signage activities. His mother sees a future for Zach in graphic design, and once pandemic restrictions have lifted, hopes to identify some appropriate coursework and internships to further his skills and opportunities.

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The staff at the vaccination site were so impressed by Zachary's piece that they had posters made of the image to display at the Dome and stickers made to distribute to people who receive their shots. Just as we proudly smack our "I voted" stickers as we leave the polling place to encourage others to do likewise, those wearing Zachary's stickers are spreading the important message to get vaccinated to the citizens of Geneseo.

Zachary and his family can take great pride in Zachary's extraordinary talent. We all should be grateful for the important advocacy role his artwork can play in ending this horrible pandemic. ■■■

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