

The Ethical Dilemma of Mandatory Influenza A Vaccinations for Optometrists

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Introduction

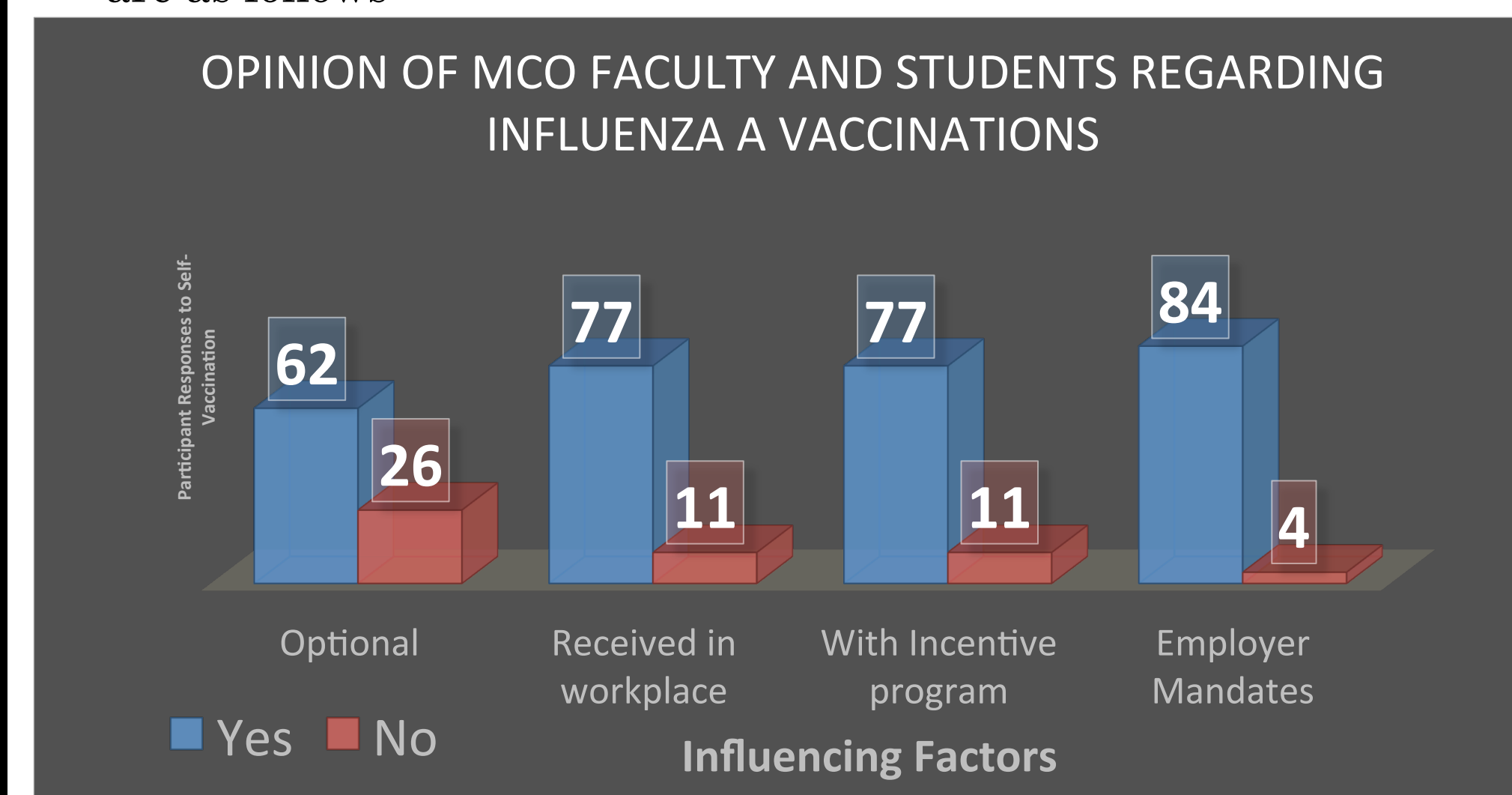
- In recent years, vaccinations of all kinds have been a hotly debated topic in media outlets and classrooms alike. Although the dialogue surrounding this topic continues to grow, many of these conversations occur outside the context of moral and ethical philosophy. The purpose of this study is to provide an ethical framework for understanding and evaluating mandatory vaccination policies (specifically Influenza A) in the hopes of ascertaining best practices for implementation and to ensure ethical transparency throughout. An anonymous survey was distributed to students and faculty of the Michigan College of Optometry in order to evaluate opinions of optometrists on the matter. In addition, a non-biased literature review of the ethical philosophy of vaccinations was performed. The basis of the framework was based on the four pillars of medical ethics; non-maleficence, beneficence, autonomy, and justice.

Methods

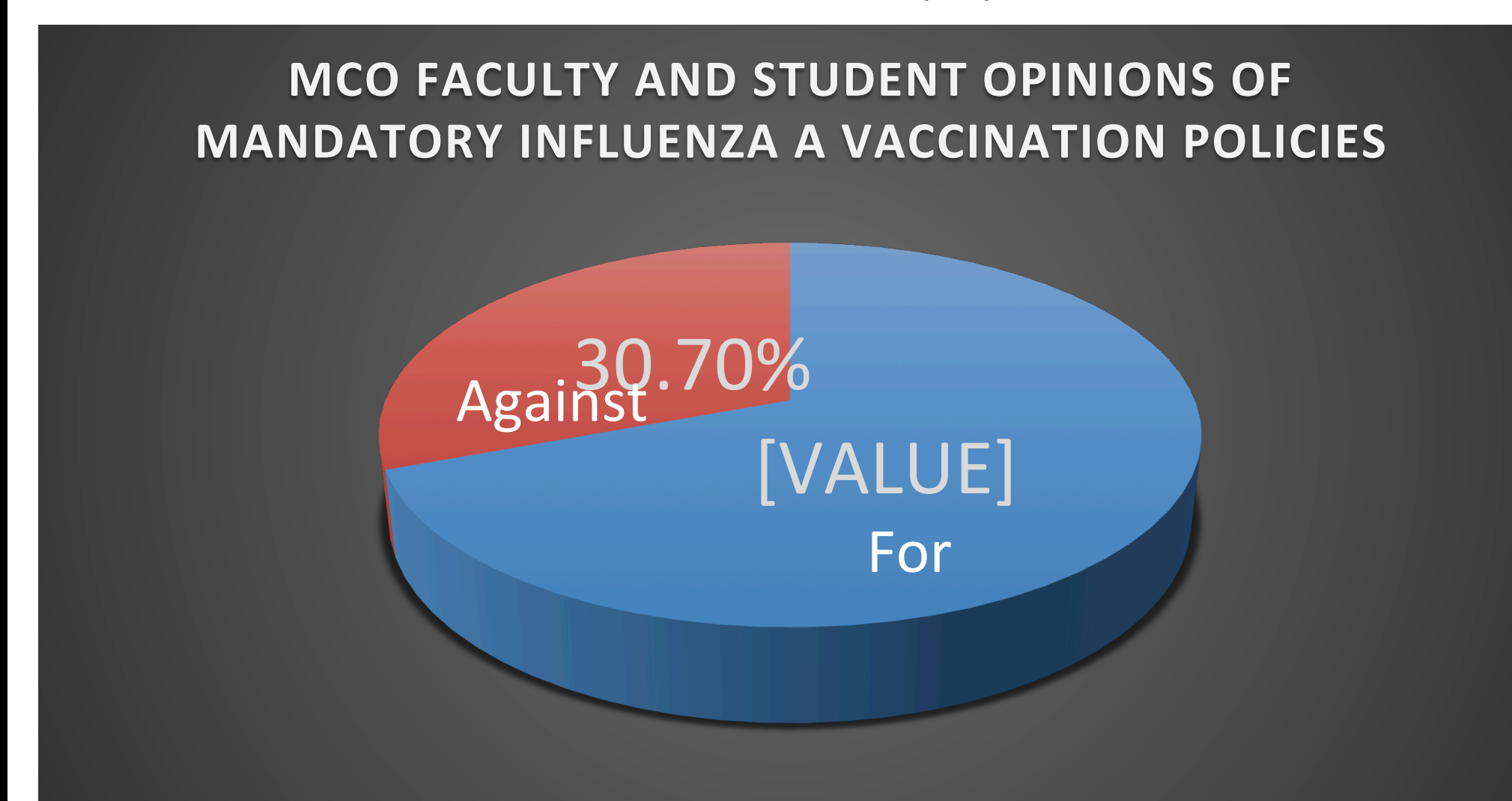
- 88 total, de-identified respondents completed the five question survey and were asked to provide reasoning behind their decisions for questions 1 and 5. Question 1 was stated as follows:
- If Influenza A vaccination was deemed optional by your employer, would you choose to get vaccinated? (70.5% Yes, 29.5% No)
- Many of the responses shared similar rationale, the most common of which are summarized below:
 - Personal Protection (33 responses)
 - Herd Immunity (28 responses)
 - Effectiveness (6 responses)
 - Doctor/CDC Recommendations (6 responses)
 - Feasibility (5 responses)
 - Aversion to Needles (2 responses)
- Question 5: Should Influenza A vaccinations be mandated for all employees? (69.3% Yes, 12.5% No)
- The most common responses to this question are outlined below:
 - Herd Immunity (23 responses)
 - Protecting Special populations (12 responses)
 - Personal Autonomy (11 responses)
 - Personal Protection (9 responses)
 - Allergy/Medical reasons (6 responses)
 - Socioeconomic Factors (4 responses)
 - Religious/Cultural Reasons (3 responses)
- Additionally, 17 responses **directly quoted optometrists' role in healthcare** as a reason for supporting mandatory Influenza A vaccination policies.

Results

- This five question research survey was completed by a total of 88 optometrists and optometry students. The results for each question are as follows:



- Q1: If influenza A vaccination was deemed optional by your employer, would you choose to get vaccinated?
Q2: Would you be more likely to consider vaccination if vaccines were administered at your workplace?
Q3: If your employer provided incentive programs for vaccinated employees, would you be more likely to consider vaccination?
Q4: If your employer required vaccination as a mandatory condition to employment, would you be more likely to consider vaccination?
Q5: Should flu vaccines be mandated for all employees?



Conclusions

- It is clear from this study that a majority of the Optometrists and optometry students of MCO support the implementation and use of the influenza A vaccine. With more research to come on the efficacy, adverse effects, etc. of the influenza A vaccine, it is reasonable to assume that public opinion on mandatory vaccines will slowly change over time.³ In conclusion, this study highlights the major points both for and against mandatory flu vaccines from the ethical perspective of non-maleficence, beneficence, autonomy, and justice; along with survey results of a small group of academic optometrists and students. We as researchers believe it is essential to consider all factors when justifying mandatory Influenza A vaccinations for health-care workers.

References

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