

ON BEING A PFIZER COVID VACCINE VOLUNTEER

I saw an announcement on Facebook inviting folks to volunteer to be in a Covid-19 vaccine trial. That sounds interesting I thought, so I responded with an email to Joyce at Sterling Research Group. This was mid-July 2020 or so. No response came my way and I thought, oh well. Then I got a nibble, a phone call with screening questions like: do you have...have you ever had...does anyone in your family...? I told the person I lived in Oxford, home of Miami University, and a likely place to encounter the virus. I could hear my caller smiling on the phone and almost hear his hands rubbing together as he explained, well we don't want you to be at high risk because your health is most important, but we don't want someone who is not likely to encounter the virus at all, because that wouldn't test our product. Kind of a "we wish you well," but not too well. I passed that screen and was told I'd get a call shortly to schedule my first appointment. I was excited and eager to participate.

And then I waited and waited. No response came my way and I thought, oh well. Then I got a call and was scheduled for my appointment, but it was to be *downtown* Cincinnati. Arghh, I didn't like the idea of that drive, but... I was scheduled for Monday September 21 at high noon. I wasn't going to forsake this opportunity. I was excited and eager to participate.

I was also given a 29 page document to read over, with this title, "A PHASE 1/2/3, PLACEBO-CONTROLLED, RANDOMIZED, OBSERVER-BLIND, DOSE-FINDING STUDY TO EVALUATE THE SAFETY, TOLERABILITY, IMMUNOGENICITY, AND EFFICACY OF SARS-COV-2 RNA VACCINE CANDIDATES AGAINST COVID-19 IN HEALTHY INDIVIDUALS." Cool!

I would be participating in phase 2/3, which simply put, means simply putting the experimental vaccine in people. I wasn't worried about getting sick from the vaccine, because "These vaccines do not contain the whole virus, or the parts of the virus that can make you ill, instead the vaccines are made up of part of the virus's genetic code, surrounded by fatty particles called lipids. They use your own cells' protein making machinery to produce some, or all, of the spike protein seen on the outside of the virus. This spike protein, made by your own body, may help your body to produce antibodies to fight against COVID-19. We will check how many antibodies you make by taking blood samples and testing them."

But, on the Friday before my appointment I got a call to stand down! Oh no, they weren't adding any new folks to the study. Oh no. I was still on a list, just in case.

And thankfully that case happened. The call came with good news, I was back in the study and even better news, I was to report to a facility just off RT275, at RT 4! on October 21. No downtown Cincinnati. Yippee!

My instructions: *Visit will be approx. 90 min, Wear Mask. Will have blood work, nasal swab, vaccine, diary instructs, Injection, Site Assess 30 min Post Injection.* Nasal swab! In all this so far, you never said nasal swab! Turned out not to be too bad. Actually tickled rather than hurt.

All went well. Got lots of information, signed documents like I was buying a house, gave blood, and had a feeling of really participating in something scientifically important! Made me feel good.

Went back 3 weeks later for the second shot, no blood taken this time. No problems.

Then back again 3 weeks later! Which was Dec 9. Gave blood and made an appointment for my 4th visit in early April. After that appointment, my next one will be in 6 months, and then a final visit in 12 months after that!

In the meantime, around mid-December the results from the vaccine trials were very exciting and very good and Pfizer applied for and received emergency authorization from the FDA. You know the rest. Perhaps you have already gotten your first shot, or are waiting in frustration for that shot! I won't editorialize here.

The study participant's dilemma: have I been vaccinated or placeboed? If my turn comes up for a vaccination, do I need it? Can one be over-vaccinated? Pfizer decided to unblind anyone who wanted to drop out of the study so he/she would know whether he/she had been vaccinated or not, and if needed, would give the person the vaccine right away. They called everyone in the trial (in this area over 44,000 people) and asked.

After much thought, I decided to stay in the study to the end. I'll go to that appointment in April, give blood and feel like I have made a contribution.

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