



Dr. Ramin Parsa-Parsi, German Medical Association

My name is Ramin Parsa-Parsi. I am a physician and head of the international department of the German Medical Association. I am also a member of the Council of the World Medical Association.

Today I am going to tell you the exciting story behind this extraordinary collaboration with the World Medical Association and the Pontifical Academy for Life – specifically how and why we made the decision to host a joint meeting and release a joint statement on the subject of vaccination.

Let me say a few words about the German Medical Association first. The GMA is the central organization in the system of medical self-administration in Germany. Representing all 500,000 registered doctors in matters relating to professional policy, the GMA regulates specialty medical training and continuing medical education in Germany.

What physicians have in common all around the world is the primary duty to promote the health and well-being of our patients. We fight for the equitable provision of care and promote strong and resilient health care systems to be able to provide care of the highest standards.

In this spirit, we have traditionally been very active in collaborating with our international colleagues. The GMA's partnership with the World Medical Association has always been a cornerstone of these efforts.

Another highly rewarding form of collaboration are cross-sectoral activities which open up new avenues for benefiting our patients.

With partners from other sectors and different areas of expertise, we can complement our knowledge and resources and expand our networks to contribute to the health and well-being of the people we serve.

During the current pandemic, the need for cross-sectoral international collaborations, especially during times of crisis and emergencies, has become even more evident.

But collaborations of this nature were something that we already valued very highly before the pandemic. In fact, the seeds of our meeting yesterday and this press conference today were planted more than two years ago, when we – the German Medical Association, Pontifical Academy for Life and the World Medical Association – agreed to join forces to address the challenges of global vaccine equity and vaccination hesitancy.

We saw the vast opportunities this extraordinary collaboration could provide in our efforts to build trust, raise awareness and achieve broader dissemination of accurate and understandable information on vaccines.

We were initially planning to hold a two-day joint expert conference on vaccination in the spring of 2020 at the exquisite Casina Pio IV at the heart of the Vatican gardens.

And then: The global pandemic hit and the challenges of vaccines and vaccination became even more apparent than ever before.

Of course, as you can see, we didn't allow the pandemic to stop us: Although we couldn't go ahead with an in-person meeting as originally planned, we remained determined to make our common voice heard and decided instead to host a condensed two-hour virtual webinar, which was held yesterday.

We are extremely pleased with the successful outcome of it and Professor Montgomery will give a quick summary in a few minutes.

Together with the Pontifical Academy for Life and the World Medical Association we have also released a joint statement which has been published today to coincide with the press conference.

Two key messages are highlighted in the statement, which calls on all relevant stakeholders to exhaust all efforts to:

1. ensure equitable global access to vaccines, which is a key prerequisite for a successful global vaccination campaign, and
2. confront vaccine hesitancy by sending a clear message about the safety and necessity of vaccines and counteracting vaccine myths and disinformation.

The current pandemic has illustrated the importance of vaccination, but it has also laid bare the great inequity of access to vaccines and the dangers posed by vaccine nationalism.

Many developing countries are at a disadvantage due to financial restrictions and limitations on production capacity, while higher-income countries have the resources to access highly effective vaccines.

Unfortunately, there is not yet an adequate supply of vaccines available and, even if vaccine production was increased, it wouldn't be enough to meet the demands of all regions of the world in a reasonable and timely manner.

Ultimately, vaccines need to be produced locally, but for this to occur several barriers need to be overcome. Solving patent issues is certainly one important element needed to support a self-sustaining system of vaccine production, but this must be bolstered by:

1. The transfer of knowledge and expertise and the training of staff.
2. International investment in vaccine production sites in resource poor settings
3. The guarantee of adequate quality control

Sadly, there are also countries where vaccines are readily available but subject to skepticism and mistrust.

Vaccine hesitancy is a complex issue. Some reluctance in disadvantaged communities is rooted in historical inequities, breaches of trust in medical research, negative experiences with health care and suspicion about pharmaceutical companies.

But a more malignant form of vaccine hesitancy is driven by unfounded and misleading claims and myths, including disinformation about side effects.

The best antidote for vaccine hesitancy is building trust, increasing transparency, and addressing communication failures. As trusted voices in the community, medical professionals play a crucial role in this scenario. By working together with the Pontifical Academy for Life, we hope to complement our efforts to generate vaccine confidence by fostering awareness and fighting the spread of myths and disinformation. Furthermore, economically or politically

motivated active dissemination of false information regarding the safety and effectiveness of approved vaccines needs to be counteracted.

Improving vaccine confidence is indeed an international challenge which requires international engagement, including interdisciplinary collaboration of the kind we are engaging in today.

We are very much aware that it is not vaccines that save lives, but rather vaccination. Our collaboration will hopefully help to boost vaccine confidence and to encourage solutions to the hurdles faced by parts of the world where vaccines are still scarce.