

Blog, 5th October 2021

Well it doesn't seem like spring despite the abundant flowering trees and frogs croaking in our pond, and the normal relief from the dark days and bad weather of winter that comes with longer evenings with the promise of summer around the corner - just isn't there with the long nearly 8 weeks of Lockdown.

While there are winners - courier drivers for instance are working long hours overtime- there are many losers and a lot of small business owners and individual contractors [who don't qualify for the wage subsidy] are struggling for work even under Level 3. We know once back even to level 2 there will be a rebound: a pent up busy time spending making up for weeks of enforced saving. No doubt savings on petrol to travel to work helps too, especially at the current high pump prices arising out of the shipping bottlenecks caused by COVID, Brexit, and two big companies controlling shipping containers [and an increasing number of port facilities in Europe]. The price of shipping container freighting has gone up nearly 300% over the last year! We are going to see increasing shortages of many items in the next few month, including pharmaceuticals and medical supplies, and that's not going to be good if Delta COVID gets away here.

Maybe our border is breaking down like I have been predicting it eventually would. I was just hoping and praying it would not happen for at least another 4-6 months to give us a chance to get our vaccination rate up very high. Victoria, Australia has 6.7m people. We have 4.9m. That means we have three quarters their population. Yet despite their total of 266 days in Lockdown compared to our Auckland 82 days [Level 3 and level 4] they are registering over 1200 cases daily to our 33, and horribly they have 3 deaths a day to our none.

Up to now our lockdowns have been stricter, the rules clearer and better observed. But that is no longer the case. Partial lockdowns involving small areas in Hamilton city and Raglan with no clear borders or policing of those borders are similar to what happened initially in New South Wales and Victoria. People are not as compliant as they were in the first Lockdown with social distancing, obeying the rules for mask wearing, and sticking to their bubbles. It won't take us long to get to Victoria's levels, for us that means 900 cases a day with 2 deaths.

Northern California gives us a picture of what could happen to us. It is currently battling a surge in cases, mostly Delta but also the new Ri.2 variant, and their hospitals and ICUs are overwhelmed with ambulances queueing outside for hours waiting to unload patients. It's about a 2/3:1/3 split in patients. 2/3 are unvaccinated who are presenting with serious enough covid illness to be admitted to hospital. 1/3 though are the vulnerable. These are cancer patients on treatment, people with immune disorders on drugs to dampen their immune systems down so diseases like Rheumatoid Arthritis are controlled, transplant patients, patients with serious genetic disabilities like cystic fibrosis and of course the elderly.

That is the stark choice that faces our Politicians. How much do they listen to the people who want to go on holiday overseas? How much do they listen to the people who want to bring tourists into New Zealand without quarantines? How much do they listen to letting New Zealanders return to New Zealand, often just for holidays to see relatives, and who didn't return early last year when they were told to? On the other hand, how many deaths is an 'acceptable' cost of opening up?

Once COVID is free to spread in this country there are more hard questions. Do people who refuse to use masks, or refuse the vaccine have the right to work alongside vaccinated and mask compliant people? This is especially the case amongst Border and frontline workers like the police and ambulance officers. As for doctors, our Medical Council have already stated it is unethical for an unvaccinated doctor to be working with patients. But there has been no similar statement from The

College of Midwives for instance.

Many of my patients have told me their boss has told them they have to be vaccinated if they want to continue to work but this is shaky ground still in Employment Law. Now, if the Speaker of the House issued a notice that everyone, employees, MPs and visitors alike, coming into Parliament Building had to show proof of vaccination, not only would he be showing leadership and protecting our very important Parliamentarians preserving democracy in this country, this action would set a very important precedent for business owners. That is my wero to you, The Hon. Trevor Mallard.

I accept people have a right to refuse vaccination but they must also accept the consequences of their decision. Already Air New Zealand has said it will be refusing to fly anyone who is not fully vaccinated. Why shouldn't business owners and managers not move to protect the rest of their employees, their customers, their reputation and particularly avoid the economic consequences of being shut down for 14 days?

6.3 billion doses of vaccine have been given now worldwide. How can anyone refuse the vaccines on the grounds they are 'untested'?

I worry about the non-covid illness out there not getting seen by us. We lost a lovely patient in the first Lockdown last year, who did not want to go into Middlemore hospital for fear of contracting COVID there, and who tried to tough it out at home. By the time she came to see me, I admitted her straight away, but it was too late and she died within days of complications of her illness leaving a bereft partner and two teenagers. That did not count as a covid related death, but it was. I think of her often.

Already this Lockdown I nearly lost another patient of complications from leaving it late to go to Middlemore. The delay at being seen at Middlemore outpatients nearly resulted in permanent blindness for another patient. Please remember we are at the surgery every day Monday to Friday [the phone doesn't go through the days we are there on Saturdays doing vaccinations]. Sure we screen patients by phone first as we can sort out a lot that way and minimise bursting bubbles, but we do bring patients in when we doctors need to examine the patient [and there is no extra costs to the patients for these extra calls, calls back about pictures sent in, or even then at the surgery visits, it all counts as one consultation.] We can see some things in the car park with the doctor dressed up in PPE gear. But there are certainly some areas none of us would want exposed in the carpark!

Be safe, be well. Jacqueline and the team at Tiakina Te Ora.