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## Shared Decision-Making and the Yellow Fever Vaccine

*Patricia Cardoso Pastura*

It was a regular afternoon in the Pediatric outpatient clinic. In that quiet afternoon, I was the attending physician in resident supervision. Outside the office, in the corridor by the door, a humble middle-aged lady approached me.

I simply tried to get away. Every day, in medical practice, we are confronted with so many situations that lead to difficult decisions ... I usually try to escape from these situations, if I can. I try to escape—that's all! In an ambulatory setting, many unscheduled patients want to be cared for ... Is it right to deny care?

Anyway, she approached me very quickly, only wanting to ask a question.

"That's my son," she said, pointing to a young boy with Down syndrome. "He is Dr. Richard's patient," she continued. "Should he be vaccinated against yellow fever? And me—do I need it too?"

"Yes!" My quick answer left no room for doubt on either side.



In fact, I have been reticent about this vaccine for years. ... The more I studied, the more reticent I became. It is another misleading aspect of medicine: the more one studies, the less one knows for certain.

We live in a country plagued by epidemics, poverty, and sadness. Our city has been protected from yellow fever, but devastated by dengue, congenital Zika syndrome, violence, and hunger. Until very recently, the risk of the vaccine was greater than the risk of an outbreak of urban yellow fever. Now everything has changed: the virus has approached the urban area again! Someone admitted a sick man to a general hospital in our city. Now there are several sick patients in the same area where unprotected people live and where only the mosquitoes circulate freely. The risk is real! I've already taken the vaccine myself. I took my children to be vaccinated. Eventually, everything went well, there were no side effects. No Guillain-Barré syndrome, no encephalitis ...

As if she could read my thoughts, she asked: "But did you receive this vaccine?"

"Doctors do know," she said. "If they get vaccinated, then we believe in the vaccine."

And almost imperceptibly, she explained her doubts: "Doc, that's because I am afraid to die!"

While I kept on hearing the echoes of this long argumentative question, for incommensurable seconds, my thoughts ran deep inside of me.

I have children too. They are healthy, but they depend on me. Not only in sickness is motherhood an urgency and responsibility. Motherhood creates



a bond that might be one of the most sacred and unquestionable bonds in the meaning of life.

Many worlds separate us—she lives the harsh realities of poverty, ignorance, and disability—however, in the face of death, we are equally vulnerable!

My answer may have sounded like a joke, but it was a shared truth; whispered so as not to be actually heard. In fact, it was more a confession than an answer: “Doc, that’s because I am afraid to die!”

“So am I!”

**Patricia Cardoso Pastura**  
is a Pediatrician at  
Oswaldo Cruz  
Foundation in Rio de  
Janeiro, Brazil. Email:  
patpastura@gmail.com