

Let's fulfill our kuleana

By RANDY KUROHARA

COVID-19 has shown us how vulnerable we are and how something we knew very little about could literally turn our world upside down overnight.

Over the past year, we have seen great suffering and loss of life around the world, nation, Hawaii and even right here in Hilo. The impact of COVID to our children, our kupuna, our families, those who lost jobs, businesses, not being able to participate in sports, cancelled events, delayed health care and so on are just too hard to measure.

The cost of our federal stimulus efforts, while important to keep many of us afloat, will be on the backs of our children and their children (literally generations to come).

While we have avoided huge community spread and hospitalizations since last year, much credit goes to people wearing their masks and following safety measures, proper and adequate testing, contact tracing, quarantine efforts, and now vaccinations.

As we begin to open up travel, schools and some sports, we recognize that we are far from being back to normal. Our best chance at getting back to the things we love is through vaccinations and achieving herd immunity so that the chances of COVID spread and serious illness is greatly diminished. Only then will we be able to resume life as close to what we had before COVID.

Since late December, health care providers have been working tirelessly to provide vaccinations to our community starting with the most vulnerable, essential workers, and the general public including anyone 16 years of age and older. As of this week, 35% of our eligible Hawaii Island population have been fully vaccinated, and we anticipate closing in on 50% of our population being fully vaccinated within the next month.

This is great progress. However, the challenge is in the next half of our population who are yet to be vaccinated, those who may be hesitant for a multitude of reasons, or simply have not yet made this a priority. Getting this next half of our population vaccinated will be the focus over the next few months.

During this phase, vaccines will be made available through outreach efforts to more rural communities and to those with more barriers than most. We hope to make getting a vaccine as simple and convenient as possible. While mass vaccination efforts such as those held at our tennis stadium will decrease as demand that can fill large venues diminishes, we expect to see continuous vaccine supplies available through in-house clinics, pharmacies, and through our health care providers.

Providing education on vaccine safety, where to get vaccinated, and creative ways to influence others to get vaccinated are important aspects to success. Please consider being a leader and carrying the torch in your community. We know that important values such as the safety of our community can only be accomplished by everyone working together.

As a community, like every other challenge we have faced on Hawaii Island, we must step up and do our part. Everyone has kuleana to keep our families and our community safe. Places where you can embrace your kuleana and take the lead include your 'ohana, community organizations, worksites, churches, sports organizations, educational settings and social networks.

For more information on how you can support Hawaii Island's vaccination efforts, email info@communityfirsthawaii.org. Let's fulfill our kuleana. We got this, Hawaii Island!

Randy Kurohara serves as executive director of Community First, a neutral forum for the community to come together and as a catalyst for solutions to improve health and lower medical costs on Hawaii Island.